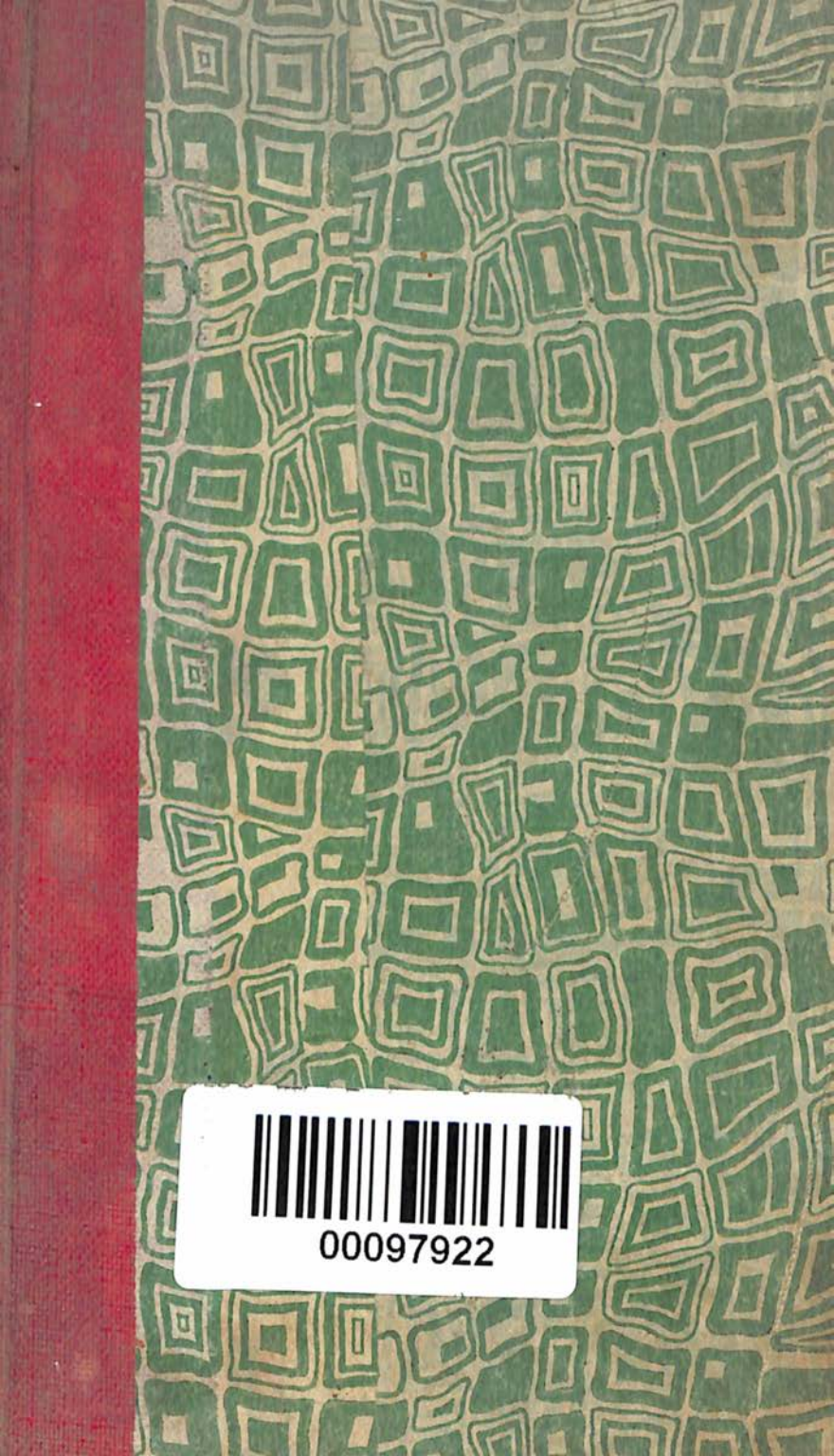
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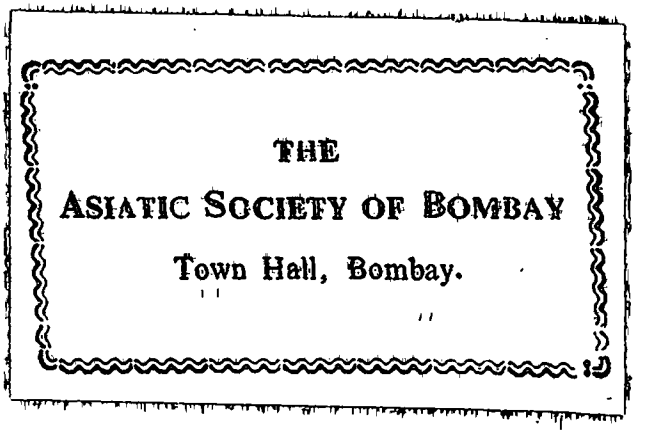

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Edinburgh, Published by Mess.rs Constable & Co.s March 1811.

LETTERS

OF

ANNA SEWARD:

WRITTEN BETWEEN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1807.

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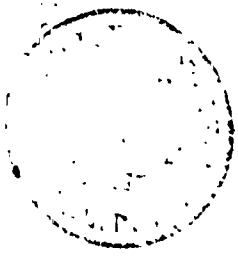

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LETTERS.

OF

ANNA SEWARD.

VOL. II.

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

—— CHRISTIE, ESQ. OF EDINBURGH.

Lichfield, Jan. 15, 1788.

MY sense of obligation is lively for * packets rich as I ever received in all that can amuse the fancy, enlarge the stock of ideas, and interest the heart.

The few short hours in which I was gratified by your society, are registered in the volume of my memory, in characters that will be coeval with its existence. Long has it been my creed that, with minds and hearts of a congenial temperament, hours may supply the place of years, and

* A tour through Derbyshire by Mr Christie, in which the character of the people, the soil, produce, and appearance of the country, its toil and manufactures, are investigated with philosophic accuracy, and with a lively perception of scenic beauty.—*S.*

the fibres of friendship take root ere the next day's sun arise. Though performance was delayed, I did not doubt the fidelity of the promise;—but looked forward to the delight I have now received from the perusal of your journals.

With your mind, its pursuits, studies, and acquirements, the rich pages now on my table seem to have given me a perfect acquaintance. Apprehensive, from the style of your address to me, that you estimate mine too highly, I feel disposed to be, what, I trust, I have not often been, an absolute egotist; for I had rather voluntarily reveal to you the scantiness of my stores, than that time should betray them.

To maintain household economy, social intercourse, and the established claims of a very large correspondence, I am obliged but very seldom to admit the visits of the Muses. With great fondness for literature, my life has been too much devoted to feminine employments to do much more than study, in every short and transient opportunity, but with eager avidity, and intense attention, that science, the first and fairest,

> ——"Which set on fire my youthful heart,
> And all my dreams, and all my wanderings shar'd
> And bless'd."

And with those various essentials, which form its

excellence, at least in the writings of others, I flatter myself that I am not unacquainted.

Without time to have attained any degree of skill in the practical part of music, which I never attempted till I had passed my twentieth year, yet my taste for it has been cultivated and refined, by listening to frequent conversations on the subject, not from arrogant and comparatively ignorant dilettantis, but from ingenious professors;—and by living in the almost daily habit of hearing vocal music, in those perfectly fine tones, and with that elegance, pathos, energy, and varied powers, which marries it to poetry.

The leading principles of fine painting are so similar to those of fine poetry, that my imagination has always interwoven those sciences, and instructed me to look at the painting in poetry, and at the poetry in picture.

I have no scientific, or rather experimental, philosophy;—but moral philosophy was always the favourite subject of my meditations. Ever have I been delighted to look at it through the light medium of Addison's writings, the grand sombre mirror of Johnson's, and the faithful and clear lens through which they shine in Beattie's. In that line of writing, Mr Aikin, and his celebrated sister, have given us a little volume, of priceless value.. It's essays are in Johnson's best manner,

possess his energy and finely-rounded periods, without the uncomfortable gloom of his sentiments, or any of that pedantry which sometimes encumbers his magnificent style.

Upon a stock of knowledge so limited, you see how impossible it is that I should accept your proposal of contributing to the Analytic Review. The sketch of its plan is extremely well drawn up; and if only men of ability shall be employed, and if they will hold fast the integrity it promises, shunning all blended interest with the corrupted, or incompetent brethren of their profession, the public may perhaps see, what it has yet seldom seen, a literary journal superior to the meanness of celebrating worthless publications, and to the injustice which tempts to vilify genius, or to degrade its claims by faint and inadequate praise; through motives venal in the first instance, and venal, or envious, or probably both, in the second. Reviewers may be venal without directly marting out their decisions for money; and this by obeying the pusillanimous fear of disobliging such of their professional brethren as do, and suffering that fear to influence their criticisms.

This ingenious sketch speaks with respect of Matty's Review. I suppose its author might be learned, industrious, and furnish good intelligence of foreign literature; but he was a contemptibly

tasteless and arrogant decider upon works of genius in his own language. He was unable to write English with any tolerable degree of elegance, or even of grammatic accuracy. Never shall I forget his long, elaborate, confused, and stupid critique upon Hayley's beautiful Triumphs of Temper. This same critique places its author amongst the minor poets of the present period. O! the Midas! the Midas! From that moment I never looked into Matty-trash. It was no meat for me. I should think my time ill-bestowed upon the Analytic Review if it is not to be infinitely more able than that publication. I dare assure myself it will, and of all things I approve of its being a day-light business! To have the names of its authors and compilers known, will be the great guards of its integrity.

The sketch promises a view of the present state of the polite arts, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and Music. Pray what has Poetry done, the eldest, the loveliest, the most intellectual, the most elevated of the arts, that her name is not enrolled with that of her sisters?

Ingenious is your parallel between the elder and the modern Erasmus. If to a creative genius, a splendid constellation of various acquirements and a generous attention to the indigent, the grace of ingenuous manners had been added,

his society must have been a copious and unfailing spring of instruction and delight—but he manœuvres in conversation, and yet often discovers that he looks down, with supercilious disdain, upon every person's understanding who presumes to dissent from his opinions.

What lustre does the grace he wants throw around the wit, the information, and the eloquence of Mrs Knowles! It is either genuine, or assumed with guarded and *unbetraying* art. However that may be, it renders her conversation delightful, whether we adopt or combat her opinions. I congratulate you upon the pleasures it will afford you. The new, the strange enthusiasm about Animal Magnetism, has seized her violently. She fervently assures me, that it is a great, important discovery in the powers of nature; capable of being highly useful in the cure of diseases, whether evident or occult, and that it makes no false pretences.

I am sure she believes what she asserts—yet, after reading your candid and rational disquisition on the subject, I stand amazed at her credulity. It must be confessed, however, maugre all the native strength of her understanding, that she has a portion of metaphysic faith, which carries her a great way up the lunar heights of system. That

recollection ought to mitigate my wonder on the magnetic theme.

When I was upon the subject of reviews, I forgot to observe, that we had once a man of great ability, taste, and integrity, who filled the department of poetic critic, during several years, in the Monthly Review. That was Mr Bentley, partner with the great Wedgewood. We found a classic spirit, and elegance in his criticisms, which rendered them at once just and delightful. He died seven years ago, and "we shall not look upon his like again." His successor, Kippis, has neither his ingenuity, his judgment, or his impartiality.

I should find the idea of few excursions so alluring as that of a tour into Scotland. In the words of Johnson, though with very different dispositions towards that country, and its inhabitants, I exclaim, respecting such a journey, "Far from me, and from my friends, be that frigid philosophy, which conducts us, cold, and unmoved, over regions that have been distinguished by genius, wisdom, bravery, and virtue."

You are very obliging in the wish, as you express it, to make me better known in Scotland;—but if an author's works do not introduce him, or her, it is in vain that the partialities of private friendship seek to give eclat. I shall, however,

gratefully accept your recommendation, if a Caledonian expedition should appear in my prospects. Invalid parents fixed me, through youth, to this peculiar spot. One link of the precious chain remains yet unbroken, and grows stronger by its very weakness, than the fetters of literal imprisonment. Stationary habits will perhaps have become invincible, ere the long-dreaded hour of my infranchisement shall arrive. Adieu!

LETTER II.

G. HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Jan. 23, 1788.

I SINCERELY thank you for your criticisms upon my poem on the Future Existence of Brutes. In consequence it has undergone several little alterations; though, where I do not feel the force of your objections, the passages remain in their original state.

In the 8th stanza I have substituted *cruel* for *barbarous*; but I must observe, that if the former had been used too near to have admitted a repetition, you would scarce be able to convince me, that

to use *barbarous* synonymously, would have been a vulgarism. *Barbarity* signifies *cruelty*, full as often as it implies an uncivilized state:

"*Barbarian* stay!—that bloody hand restrain!"——*Pope.*

I cannot, in the next quatrain, learn to dislike the word * *steely*, as applied to spurs. It is certainly of the tribe of your old aversions; but as Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Pope, were as fond as you are averse to the whole confraternity, snowy, steepy, grassy, turfy, &c. I must always dissent from an every-way impolitic desire of excluding them from the poetic page. Doubtless those great authors felt, as strongly as myself, the important power they possess of putting the sense of two or three words into one, and of increasing the general harmony by softness of termination.

Dear to the poet are all the privileges which enable him to say much in little. Pity that you thus suffer prejudices to spoil, at times, such excellent critical abilities!

I could easily alter the line you object to in the 10th, as obscure,

---

* Speaking of post-horses,

"While smites the lash, the *steely* torments goad."

——————" Beneath a load
Their fainting strength is basely doom'd to bear."

Thus,

" Which their exhausted strength is doom'd to bear."

Yet I shall not, because I like the first reading much better; *that*, and *which*, and *whom*, are words poets ought always, upon established privilege, to omit, wherever their omission does not produce obscurity. Every one accustomed to poetic language, and such only is it of consequence to please, will, I am sure, understand the 10th and 11th stanzas, as instantly with their ellipsis as without it. The *that's*, the *which's*, the *who's*, and the *whom's*, are prosefiers, and are always in some degree injurious to the melody of verse. Not to leave such things to be supplied by the reader's imagination is to suppose it dull indeed. Pope would have stared had a poetic reader told him, that the following couplet was obscure for want of the word *whom*,

" O Death! all eloquent, you only prove
What dust we doat on when 'tis man (whom) we love."

Surely inelegance results from the insertion, not from the omission of such feeble expletives!

I am glad you like my word *retributory*, for which I know not that I have any poetical authority. Belford says to Lovelace, in the great work of Richardson, "something strangely retributive seems going forward."

I confess that the second and eighteenth stanzas are prosaic; but, in argumentative verse, the occurrence, at intervals, of unornamented diction is not censurable, provided it does not degenerate into vulgarism. Those stanzas are necessary links in the chain of my reasoning;—but I found it impossible to make them take the poetic gilding.

It would jar me to part with the epithet *natural* for the temper of the dog.

I am proud of your praise of the *twenty-fourth quatrain, which is one of my greatest favourites in the poem.

Stanza 25th, I think the word *mark* more spirited than *see*, and as such retain it; but I have adopted your alteration of the word *fierce* into *savage*.

In the 26th, your proposal of changing the word *endeared* to *dear*, in order to avoid the

---

* When unattach'd, and yet to man unknown,
Wolfish and wild, the wilderness he roves,
Bays, with his horrid howl, the silent moon,
And stalks the terror of the desert groves.

elision, I reject, upon the principle of preferring sense to sound.

With honest joy *th' endear'd* commission brings.

To say "With honest joy the *dear* commission brings," would fail to express, by reference, that sentiment of affection to his master, which *endeared* conveys. That which is *dear* may be so for itself, and, in this case, for the mere exercise it gives. That which is *endeared* must have been made precious by some previous consideration. You see I have changed *intrusive* for *intrusion*. Whenever the modes of expression are equal in my own choice, I respect the preference of a friend.

* In the 29th, you wish the second line softened; but the harshness was purposed, as expressing fatigue by the dragging sound. I have made the slight change you suggested in the first line of the 30th; but in the following:—"Ha! does he pass the interdicted bounds!" I cannot expunge the interjection. Many, perhaps, may object to it; but there are who will think, with me, that it gives dramatic spirit to the description.

When night broods sullen o'er the drowsy earth,
Though faint with mid-day toil, he scorns repose,
Leaves the warm comforts of thy glowing hearth,
To guard thy slumbers, and appal thy foes.

The first line of the 31st pleads the poetic privilege of being allowed to leave something to the imagination, by using a mode of expression not unfrequent with our best writers. In prose, I should have said, "Whether he be a beast of prey, or a man devoted to guilt." Permit me to give you instances of similar ellipsis. In the Fifth Book of Paradise Lost, Satan, addressing the forbidden fruit,

> ——————"Fair plant, with fruit surcharg'd,
> Deigns none to ease thy load, and taste thy sweets?
> Nor God, nor man? is knowledge so despis'd?—
> *Or* envy *or* what reserve forbids to taste?
> Forbid who will, none shall from me with-hold
> Longer, thy offer'd good."

"Whether it be envy or reserve that forbids others to taste of thee," is the implied meaning; and, to people used to poetry, surely sufficiently implied; while the ellipsis, by curtailing the words, gives rapid force to the meaning. Again, in the same poem, Book Tenth, line 245,

> ——————"Whatever draws me,
> *Or* sympathy, *or* some connatural force."

Or beast of prey or man, to guilt devote,
With fangs terrific, and with burning eyes,
Thy brave protector rushes on his throat,
And low, in blood, the dark destroyer lies.

Milton would have said in prose, "by whatever I am drawn, whether by sympathy or by some connatural force."—Also,

"*Or* true, *or* false, to me it matters not."—*Jephson's Narbon.*

That is, whether it be true or false; and thus the ever accurate Pope,

"Alike *or* when, *or* where, they shone, or shine,
Or on the Rubicon, *or* on the Rhine."

This is the most luxuriant use of the ellipsis I recollect in so short a limit—the sense could not have been contained in one couplet, but for the lavish use of that privilege.

Johnson tells us, in his Dictionary, that "the particle *or*, sometimes, but rather inelegantly, stands for *either*, and sometimes for *before*, but the latter usage is obsolete." He mentions not that it more frequently supplies the place of four syllables, *whether it be.*

The use of the particle *or* might have been defined with more justness, thus: "It is one of the privileges of verse to condense expression, by making the little particle *or* supply the place, first, of four syllables, *whether it be;* second, of the double syllable, *either;* and third, of the word *before,* though this last usage is not common with

modern writers, but it is employed with fine effect by the ancient ones. The first usage might be illustrated by the above, or by similar quotations; and the second, where *or* is substituted for *either*, as follows:

——————" O Rossanno!
Or give me way, or thou art no more my friend."
Rowe's Fair Penitent.

" Or grant me this, or with a monarch's claim,
My hand shall seize some other captive dame."
Pope's Homer.

In the third and last instance, where this particle is used for *before*,

" Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns."—*Psalms.*

" Learn before thou speakest, and use physic,
Or ever thou be sick."
Ecclesiastes, chap. xviii. *verse* 19.

——————" The dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd for whom; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying, or ere they sicken."—*Shakespeare.*

I did not expect you would like the * 37th stanza,

---

* Ah wretch ingrate! to liberal hope unknown,
Does pride incrust thee in so dark a heaven,
To deem this spirit (purer than thy own)
Sinks, when thou soarest to the light of Heaven?

because of the second line, which has too much of the bold simplicity of the elder writers in its metaphor to please a taste of so much modern refinement—and yet you do not like the specimens I inclosed from Darwin's refined and splendidly ornamented poem, in which there is nothing of that simplicity which you will not endure in poetry of this day—in truth it is hard to please you.

In the 39th I have changed, at your suggestion, the word Omnific for Almighty;—but not because I can agree with you that *omnific* is quaint, since to me it appears the reverse, but because, on strict examination, it does not suit the sense so well as *almighty*, since the precise meaning of omnific is all-creating—but how fine is the word in Milton!

> "Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou deep, peace!
> Said then the Omnific Word, your discord end!"

You will be glad to apply that command to this review of your criticisms; nor shall I be sorry to enforce its obedience;—but suffer me to assure you that I am extremely obliged by your attention to my poem. It has been to its advantage in several instances.

LETTER III.

REV. ——— BERWICK.

Lichfield, Jan. 24, 1788.

IF life was not so short, if time did not fly so fast, if connections did not increase so rapidly, I might not have been forced, two years ago, to make a resolution of avoiding to enter into any new correspondences. That resolution has, in the interim, withstood many powerful temptations, and upon its future firmness my ease, and I have reason to think my health, depends. In the apparent quietness of Lichfield, my hours of leisure are few. Filial cares and attentions;—the transacting all my father's business, social claims, and long-established correspondence with a number of friends;—what, alas, of time so swiftly whirled away, remains to me for needful exercise, and for the beloved employment of reading? Pity therefore, I intreat, the regret I feel when talents, and dispositions, esteemed, and interesting to me as yours, offer me pleasures which I am obliged to decline.

Your last letter, like your former, gratified me

by its kindness and amused me by its wit. My mind imaged you in your little lonely parsonage, listening to the loud winds, and beating rain;—but they were innoxious storms; and memory, presenting those to which you were so lately exposed, would make their loudest howl music in the comparison.

Whenever you retire to your vicarial mansion, I certainly wish for you the society of a friend:—yet the solitude of minds enabled to gild it by their own resources, is to me no object of pity. Do you not think me strangely unfeeling, that I commiserate, as yet, none of the evils of which you complained? Assure yourself, however, that I should lose my philosophy were you to speak of any circumstance that sickened at your heart, and strewed your pillow with thorns;—but never for misfortunes; during the narration of which, Wit peeps over your shoulder, puts his hand before your mouth, and tells the story himself.

I once wrote a sonnet in such an hour as you describe. If it pleases you I shall be gratified. Suppose it does not, you say. Why then Heaven forbid I should be quite so much the author as to like you instead of it the worse for such disapprobation.—Such as it is behold it:

Invitation to a Friend.

When dark December shrouds the transient day,
And stormy winds are howling in their ire,
Why com'st not thou, who always can'st inspire
The soul of cheerfulness, and best array
A sullen hour in smiles?—O! haste to pay
The cordial visit sullen hours require!
Around the circling walls a glowing fire
Shines;—but it vainly shines in this delay
To blend thy spirit's warm Promethean light.
Come, then, at Science, and at Friendship's call,
Their vow'd disciple; come, for they invite!
The social powers without thee languish all;
Come, that I may not hear the winds of night,
Nor count the heavy eave-drops as they fall!

But to resume your misfortunes.—I recollect something for which I do commiserate you;—the vanity and impertinent intrusion of an everlasting dabbler in the drains of Parnassus, which he believes the purest streams of its fountains; and imagines that when he bespatters you with their mud, he is pouring forth elegant libations. It is thus that I am often anointed, through the epistolary channel; and thus am doomed to augment continually the number of my rhyming foes, because I cannot stoop to flatter them that their dusky streams are pellucid.

Lichfield has been very dissipated through the

winter. Plays thrice in the week—balls and suppers at our inns, cards and feasting within our houses. No mode of amusement neglected, except that in which we are best calculated to excel—our concerts. Unluckily for me they are the only Lichfield public amusement I can partake with delight.

The late rains, leaving our fields a swamp, have prevented my winter's walk to the mansion on the hill, where I always find recompence for having breasted the cutting blasts;—that mansion so soon, alas! to be deserted!—over which, as I shall just discern it at closing day from the windows of my drawing-room, I shall often sigh and exclaim,

"There's no light in my lady's bower!"

Adieu! I hope the period at which we may see you again in Lichfield, is at no immeasurable distance.

LETTER IV.

THOMAS CHRISTIE, ESQ. EDINBURGH.

Lichfield, Jan. 27, 1788.

I AM glad to find your health improving. So ardent a pursuit of knowledge, such extraordinary insight into so many of its avenues at your very early period of life, makes one tremble lest the corporal springs should be weakened by intense and perpetual pressure upon those of the intellects.

The allegoric vision in the charming journals you sent me, is dear to my understanding, and to my heart; but genius, piety, and candour, very sweetly blended, shine with clear and steady light through every page of those journals. Your account of the mud city entertained me infinitely. It was indeed pity that Rousseau had not been made its governor.

I never saw Belmont, but have heard much of its beauty. The scenery of Colton I know to be uncommonly fine. Look in the Gentleman's Magazine for May last, and you will find verses of mine that are tolerably faithful to the peculiar

features of that valley; that Eden amid the wilderness, with its grey zone of barren mountains.

Mr Sneyd of Belmont was the friend of my youth, and many a pleasant hour has glided away in his society beneath my father's roof, and in his own house, when his sisters lived with him at the family-seat in the more cultured and less romantic neighbourhood of Stafford. That seat he sold some years since. My fair and gentle sister, who died in the flower of her youth, was his first love; but his family were desirous that he should marry to higher rank, and ampler fortune; and succeeded in persuading him to stifle the fast-growing tenderness. Vanity, I think, more than passion, afterwards gave his hand to a proud Beauty, who alienated him from many of his former friends. Our family were of that number. His present lady, the cousin-german of his first, is a very different woman, friendly and good;—but the habits of intimacy broken are not easily resumed. People form new connections with more facility.

Of your other friend on the Derbyshire tour, Sir Isaac Heard, I have heard much;—of his, and of his lady's virtues. Their history is marked and interesting. His constancy to her, which had the severest trials, was that of earlier and purer ages.

With a son of Lady Heard's, by a former husband, I was well acquainted; the most prepossessing being, of fourteen, I ever knew—he sunk, by consumption, at eighteen; a fallen blossom, but a translated Angel.

I doubt whether the utility of Doctor Croft's projected dictionary will be in proportion to the immense labour of the undertaking. Upon one of your objections to Johnson's, viz. that he contents himself with giving very copious authorities for the use of words, without telling us his own opinion of the respect due to those words, I must observe, that I think it a very judicious abstinence. Opinions are so various; verbal partialities, and verbal dislikes, as well as prejudices of other kinds, are so frequent, and so arbitrary, that perhaps no one person has a right to decide upon the elegance, or inelegance of particular words, or modes of expression. With two people, equally ingenious, I often find one very fond of certain verbalisms, and usages of style, which the other detests. What then remains but to settle these wide extremes of differing tastes, not by reference to the opinion of any third individual, but by examining whether they are in frequent use with various writers of acknowledged eminence?

Till people have familiarized themselves with such writers, and learned to appreciate the weight

of their respective authorities, they will do well to abstain from using any word or phrase, in their own writings, which are not in general use, always taking care to avoid idioms, which disgrace serious composition of every sort. They should also shun all expressions which are pert, quaint, or vulgar.

Certainly Johnson's reason for excluding Bollingbroke and Shaftesbury, from his list of authorities, was a most ridiculous one. O! let us be thankful, that a being so prejudiced, forbore to throw the iron fetters of his dogmas over our style! Have we not enough of his attempting to throw them over our poetic taste, in that unjust, and because ingenious so much the more mischievous, work, the Lives of the Poets?

I hope Doctor Croft will not take up that arrogance, which the most arrogant of men forbore to assume. What right has one man's opinion to "bestride the verbal world, like a Colossus."

Shaftesbury was a much admired prose writer in his day, but within the last fifty years nothing has made greater progress to perfection than style. Shaftesbury has one most inelegant mode of expression, viz. "this is pleasant enough, in the way of gaiety and humour;"—and "such arrangement is powerful, in the way of argument;"—and "these fancies may be well parried, in the way of burlesque." In short, I found this trick of

phraseology perpetually in *my way*, when I was looking for the celebrated elegance of Lord Shaftesbury's style.

What an enthusiast you are to London! I wish you do not say a great deal too much for that imperial city. For her greatness perhaps you cannot, but for her justice I think you do. How does Johnson esteem her? let us hear him:

> "London, the needy villain's general home,
> The common-shore of Paris, and of Rome."

Cowper in his Task has given a more faithful portrait of her than you, in your youthful glow of generous partiality, or than Johnson in his caustic spleen.

The worthy Mr Green, and the ingenious and enlightened Mr Saville, desire their compliments; I wish you knew more of the latter. He is a man of strong imagination, and benevolent sensibility, with a considerable fund of classic and scientific knowledge;—nor know I a better poetic critic; though his accurate severity now and then makes my muse murmur a little, but reflection generally shows me that he is right.

I have mentioned you to Mr Hayley and Miss Helen Williams, as a rising character in the literary world.

——— "Proceed, illustrious youth,
And virtue guide thee to the throne of truth!"

Yes, in every opinion, and in every science.

LETTER V.

J. WEDGEWOOD, ESQ.

Lichfield, Feb. 18, 1788.

I AM honoured and obliged by your endeavours to enlighten me on a subject so important to human virtue and human happiness. They have not been vain; and I blush for the coldness my late letter expressed, whose subject demanded the ardour of benevolent wishes, and of just indignation.

Let me, however, do myself the justice to observe, that my heart always recoiled with horror from the miseries which I heard were inflicted on the negro slaves; but I have had long acquaintance with a Mr Newton of this place, who made a large fortune in the East, where slavery pervades every opulent establishment. He con-

stantly assured me, that the purchase, employment, and strict discipline of the negroes were absolutely necessary to maintain our empire, and our commerce, in the Indies. As constantly did he affirm, that they were of a nature so sordid and insensible, as to render necessary a considerable degree of severity, and to make much lenity alike injurious to the indulger and the indulged; that the accounts of the cruelties practised upon the slaves by their masters were false, or at least infinitely exaggerated. He observed, that the worst people will abstain from vice, when it is against their interest to practice it; that the high price and value of the subjugated, inevitably preserves them from the dire effects of this imputed barbarity.

When I sighed over the severe discipline, for the necessity of which he pleaded, I was desired to recollect the fate of the Ashwells—uncle and brother to young gentlewomen of this town. The former, a West India Planter, whose compassionate temper, which his nieces assert had been ever soft and indulgent, even to weakness, led him to give his slaves unusual relaxation from toil, and to take scrupulous care that they were constantly and plentifully supplied with wholesome food; yet was he murdered by them in the

most cruel manner; and his nephew, then a youth of fourteen, *intentionally* murdered; they ham-stringed, and cut off his left arm, and two of the fingers on his right hand, leaving him, as they thought, lifeless.

The last mentioned Mr Ashwell, who lives the hapless wreck of negro cruelty, uniformly confirmed to me, for I have often conversed with him, all Mr Newton had told me of the generally treacherous, ungrateful, and bloody temper of the negroes. Impressed with these ideas, I was led to consider the present efforts for their enfranchisement, as fruitless and dangerous, though just and humane; that the Scriptures, which often mention slavery, bear no testimony against it as impious; that, in some countries, the subjection of beings, that form the latest link in the chain descending from human to brute animality, was an evil inevitable, as war between nations has always been found in every climate.

Beneath the force of that melancholy conviction, I avoided reading any thing upon the subject; flattering myself, that if the abolition of a traffic so lamentable could be safely effected by our legislators, they, as Englishmen and Christians, would listen to merciful remonstrance, and feel themselves impelled to abolish it.

Your letter, and the tracts which accompanied it, have changed my ideas on the subject. They have given me indignant convictions, decided principles, and better hopes that the flood-gates of this overwhelming cruelty may be let down without ruin to our national interests.

But as to your exhortation that I would write a poem on the subject, I sicken at the idea of encountering the certain pains, and uncertain pleasures of publication, by committing this theme to my muse, fruitful as it is in the great nerves of poetry, pathos, and horror; and this, because I have no confidence that her voice would arrest the general attention. Better poetry than mine, though richly the product, is not the taste of this age. Mr Day's sublime poem, The Dying Negro, past away without its fame, though eminently calculated to impress the public with horror of the slave-trade.

You gratify me much by speaking so highly of my Elegies on Cooke and André, and on Lady Millar. When the society for arts and sciences, of which my acquaintance, Sir Joseph Banks, is President, struck a medal in honour of Captain Cooke, Mr Green of our museum had one, and indeed every person who had interested themselves at all publicly in the memory of that philanthropic hero.

——————* "To me alone
One of old Gideon's miracles was shown;
For upon all the quicken'd ground
The fruitful seed of Heaven did brooding lie,
And nothing but the muses fleece was dry."

Then the public hireling critics are not my friends; and I have personal enemies in some of them, rendered such by my sincerity, and because I could not stoop to flatter with praise the miserable rhymes they presented to me; and for that sin of omission to their vanity, they load my writings with imputed vulgarness, bombast, immorality, and obscenity itself, as the European Magazine and English Review testify. However contemptible such evidently groundless censure, it is not very pleasant to its object.

In losing † Mr Bently, my muse lost a friend and protector. I had not the pleasure of being known to that gentleman, when he spoke to the public in such warm praise of my writings, either personally or by letter. He fanned her fires with the breath of ingenious, generous, classical, and

* From Cowley's Ode on being refused a place at Court, with the hopes of which he had been flattered by Charles the Second, to whose interests he had devoted himself in that monarch's adversity.—*S.*

† He was reviewer in the poetic department of the Monthly Review many years.—*S.*

discriminating praise. I knew not, at the time, to whom I was so much obliged.

That charming writer, Miss More, has given the world a poem on the Slave Trade; so has her ungrateful pupil Lactilla. I have not yet seen either of those compositions; but I cannot prevail upon myself to give my scribbling foes new opportunity of venting their spleen, by speaking to the world of the inferiority of my attempt to that of the unlettered milk-woman's. So, I am sure, they would say, were I to write as well as Milton on the theme.

How should these reflections fail to extinguish the ardour of my exertion, when it feels inclined to struggle for an escape from common-life avocations to Aonian employments! My only stimulus, from without, to an attempt on this occasion, is the consciousness that you, and a few other ingenious friends, are predisposed in its favour. I confess that to be a powerful one. During an whole hour after I received your letter, it maintained its ground ere it sunk beneath the snow-drifts of opposing recollections.

LETTER VI.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, March 1, 1788.

I rejoice that Mont Blanc lifts its majestic head in the poetic world. Several of my *late letters have mentioned this poem, and the charitable reason for publishing it, more meritorious than the thirst of fame.

I have mentioned it also in our Lichfield circles; but while those who form them seek my society, they pay no attention either to my wishes or opinions respecting books, and often express their dislike of poetry in my presence, or parade, with their silly affectation of not understanding it; as if sense, sentiment, or description, could be obscured by the graces of measure, or the harmony of rhyme.

But, emerging from these mists of spleen rather than of ignorance, let me turn my eyes to the stupendous mountain of Savoy, which you have gilded with a light so radiant.

*The passages that announce it have been omitted in the transcript, on account of the strictures upon it in this epistle.—S.

My imagination met your poem with that sort of delight with which I met you last summer at Ludlow; and which no stranger, however brilliant, however estimable, could inspire in the fancy on one hand, in the heart on the other.

My convictions of the merit of this various, glowing, and spirited poetic picture, are confirmed on every new examination. If it is not ardently acknowledged by the whole class of modern readers, their injustice will, in part, result from the stupidity, jealousy, or venality of the public critics. Your and my friend will perhaps bestow a few guineas, gliding to them in a channel, secret even from themselves, but which shall have power to purchase the insertion of those sort of critiques, upon which his envy shall banquet in private.

I said, *in part*, for the locusts of anonymous criticism are not the sole causes of that blight, beneath which I have observed many a rich poetic harvest to wither uncropt in its first season. Poetry is not the fashionable study of the present age. We have plenty of fine writers, but there is a dearth of readers.

A few lines in this poem I could wish elevated, which are, perhaps, a little too prosaic for the general tenor of the style; but these blemishes, if blemishes they are, seem but dust in the ba-

lance against its noble enthusiasm, the strength and glow of appropriated description, so novel and so magnificent. Your Lemyr-Gegar rises in poetic sublimity above the Eagle of Pindar and of Gray. He is shewn in more energetic action, and in more various points of view. When, wheeling round the cliffs, he pursues the Chamois, as it bounds, terrified, from rock to rock, the whole scene is alive; and when, after the storm, he soars to the emerging sun, the passage is of rarely excelled grandeur.

Last Friday morning brought me a visitor, whom I received, and to whom I listened with that awe-mixed delight, which Milton has assigned to Adam,

> "When Raphael, the celestial visitant, deign'd
> As man with man, as friend with friend, to sit
> Indulgent in the bower."

Yes, my dear Mr Whalley, the Christian hero, Mr Howard, sat with me great part of Friday morning, leading me through scenes of infinite interest to the heart, and which I should like to retrace with you.

You wish to see something new of mine. There is no possibility that I should obtain leisure to raise new poetic fabrics. I only wish for

time to arrange and publish the large materials for my Miscellany. Could that be done, it would be only standing one running fire from the Dennises and Gildons of the present day;—it would be only feeling the anxieties of publication once, and then delivering up to the justice of posterity my whole stock of pretensions:—Posterity, which seldom fails, sooner or later, to recal what is worth recalling from the shades of oblivion; in which, for a time, many superior works to any I can produce have been enveloped, by the neglect of that ungrateful age which they adorned.

That my writings should ever experience this regeneration, I am far from depending; but I believe they will, if they deserve it. It has long been my wish to "leave my name in life's visit." Should the ink in which it is written prove of a fading and perishable quality, there is no help for that, you know.

As to the present age, which sits listening to its critical Cerberuses, that it may echo their barkings, vain are the hopes of poetic genius to meet its applause. Jephson! the fate of thy three last admirable tragedies,—the Law of Lombardy, the Count of Narbonne, and Julia, can witness how vain! Abused as contemptible bombast by all the reviewers; and, in consequence, neglected by an unfeeling public, though the true dramatic spirit glows through every scene; though

the characters are all strongly marked, and finely discriminated; though pathos and horror breathe all their powers.

Last night I saw the Mentevoli of the Julia performed by a spirited tragedian of the name of Rosewel. Julia was also sweetly and gracefully represented by Mrs Nunns. Through the whole interesting performance, I thought of a line in the Revenge, and applied it to the author of Julia, as indubitably one of those distinguished few,

> "Souls made of fire, and children of the sun."

The finest stage situation in this tragedy is taken from the penknife-scene in that glorious work, the Clarissa.

Giovanni, and his daughter, and my dear invalid, join me in every good wish to yourself and Mrs Whalley.

Assure Mrs Piozzi, when you meet her next, of my frequent recollection of all she has looked, said, and written to me.

You have doubless luxuriated in the late vernal mildness of our noons; but we must expect hybernal relapses; that, ere he takes his final flight,

> "Winter will oft at eve resume the breeze,
> Chill the pale morn, and bid his driving sleets
> Deform the day delightless."

But small is their power to depress, where the Lares are found on the hearth, the Muses breathe inspiration, and the affections diffuse comfort.

LETTER VII.

MRS PIOZZI, on her Publication of JOHNSON'S Letters.

Lichfield, March 7, 1788.

THIS kind present, your last entertaining and valuable publication of the Goliah's Epistles, at once obliges and does me honour. They shew him in a more benign, though less resplendent point of view, than, perhaps, any other of his writings, or than he could appear from any veritable records of his conversation, since you have, doubtless, expunged the malignant passages, from your benevolent attention to the feelings of many.

Letter-writing, however, appears not to have been his talent, though, in the course of these epistles, we find frequently scattered rays of Johnsonian fire. He, whose eloquence has, in his essays, unrivalled majesty and force, seems an unwieldy trifler. When he will gambol, he gam-

bols best with Dr Taylor's great bull, a sort of cousin-german of his in strength and surliness.

His playfulness wants the elegance, his wit the brilliance, and his style the polished ease of Gray's Letters; which, as letters, are very superior indeed to Johnson's, though he pronounces them a dull work; but that was from envy.

Your epistles in this collection outshine your preceptor's, and are the gems of the volume. A transcendence so decided, must surely oblige the English to imitate the justice of the Theban literati, and, in this mutual display of epistolary powers, decree that palm to you which crowned the lyre of Corinna in her contest with Pindar.

——————" 'Tis hard to cull
The primal grace where many graces charm;"

Yet I think my first favourite is your letter to a bridegroom. It is of twin-excellence to that celebrated one of St Evremond's to a young and lovely married woman, who wished to preserve her amorous empire.

Johnson, as a writer, is most himself in his letters from Scotland. We are delighted to observe him familiarly sketching out those scenes, of which his Tour presents so sublime a picture. Mr Boswell will be gratified to find here, in Dr

Johnson's approbation of his anecdotes, a full acquittal of his imputed treachery to the confidence and fame of his friend. Those who brought that accusation against Mr Boswell, evinced that they little understood Johnson's character. He said nothing to any one in confidence. Far from wishing to hide, he gloried in his malignity, and in the trust that it would be recorded. He had none of those "compunctious visitings of nature," which make softer dispositions scrupulous of wounding the feelings of others. I have heard him say, that distinguished people know that their colloquial opinions will be recorded, and their letters published.

Your translation of his Latin verses to Dr Laurence forms an elegant poem, and the joint translations from Boethius have accuracy and spirit.

Miss Weston told me you asked her if certain verses, signed Anna Matilda, were *mine*. Not they indeed;—nor know I any thing of their origin, except from internal evidence; but it is so strong, as to be entirely conclusive with me, that the Della Cruscas, and the congenial rants which pretend to reply to them, are from the same pen, whoever Mr Merry may persuade to mother them. No two writers could have such entirely similar extravagancies in their compositions. The only verses I remember to have printed without my

name were an epigram on the abusive critics of Mr Hayley's writings, and a little poem to Mason, in the Gentleman's Magazine for October 1784; reproaching him for his silence over Johnson's malignant injustice to the greatest lyric poet the world ever produced, not excepting Pindar himself;—that poet his departed friend.

I should suppose Pindar could not, and our scholars confess to me he did not, excel Gray in the sublimity of his imagery, or in the grandeur and variety of his numbers; and our translations of Pindar show me that the Greek poet's subjects were less elevated, less interesting.

Nothing is less to be trusted than the fidelity of Doctor Johnson's pen, when he aims to be characteristic. How different from what she really was must posterity conceive of his daughter-in-law, Lucy Porter, from the following sentence in these letters: "Miss Lucy has raised my esteem by many excellencies, very noble and resplendent, though a little discoloured by hoary virginity."

Ill did those elevated appellations suit her downright honesty, seldom if ever expanding into generosity;—her illiterate shrewdness, and cherished vulgarism. Hoary virginity may justly be said to discolour personal graces; but those she never possessed beyond the result of a round

face, with tolerably pretty features, though in the shadeless blankness of flaxen hair and eye-brows, —and a clean fair skin. These, I am told, were the sum total of her charms in the years of bloom, and that her figure had never any elegance. If beauty of face, and grace of form, had ever been hers, they are not properties to raise esteem, while, over the splendour and nobleness of intellectual qualities, the hoary virginity of fifty-two could not well have cast any dimness.

I have a consciousness of obligation to you, my dear Madam, on the ground of this publication, besides the kindness, which makes it a token of your amity. I always visited, and received visits from Doctor Johnson, on every residence of his in our town, excepting only the few days in which you were here with him. A shyness between Mrs Lucy Porter and myself, the only estrangement that ever happened between us, and which had no continuance, unfortunately for me, existed at that period, depriving me of the desired pleasure of waiting upon you.

Greatly as I admired Johnson's talents, and revered his knowledge, and formidable as I felt the powers to be of his witty sophistry, yet did a certain quickness of spirit, and zeal for the reputation of my favourite authors, irresistibly urge me to defend them against his spleenful injustice:—

a temerity, which I was well aware made him dislike me, notwithstanding the coaxing regard he always expressed for me on his first salutations on returning to Lichfield. The breath of opposition soon used to collect the dark clouds on his horizon,

"Who sat to give his little senate laws."

Since I see so many Lichfield people mentioned in these letters, whose visits were not much more frequent than mine, and whose talents had no sort of claim to lettered attention, there can be no great vanity in believing that he would not pass me over in total silence. Therefore is it that I thank you for your suppressions. I must have been pained by the consciousness of going down to posterity with the envenomed arrows of Johnson's malevolence sticking about me; though I am well aware, from the recording spirit of his less benevolent biographers, that it is the fate of numbers to bear them, whose virtues and abilities are superior to mine.

I cannot imagine what anonymous poem it could be, which it appears, from these letters, that he was solicited to read on one of his visits to Lichfield in 1781. Not a creature among the number of his visitors, whom he mentions, are

capable of being enough interested about any poetic effort to have requested his attention to it. I never shewed him, or asked his opinion about a single line of mine, either in print or manuscript, nor of any unpublished work of others. To me he almost invariably spoke with strong dislike of all our celebrated female writers, except yourself. As I so carefully avoided all conversation that could lead to the subject of my compositions, it was the only way he had of imparting that mortification to my literary self-love, which it was the first joy of his gloomy spirit to impart to every person, at times.

That any human being, male or female, could endeavour to draw Johnson's attention to their own writings, is to me astonishing. How little insight into character must they, who made the rash, the vain attempt, have possessed!

Once, however—perhaps as a reward for the unobtrusive disposition of my muse, he paid an high compliment, in my presence, to my Elegy on Cook. He was speaking favourably of the Columbia of Madame Bocage, and added, "she describes many things well, but nothing so well as you have described the seas, and shores, round the South Pole." I blushed, curtsied, and instantly turned the conversation into a different channel.

Another time, when I was not present, he spoke very handsomely indeed of my writings, in a large company at Mrs Porter's—but that was because his opinion about them was asked with an air and manner which unmasked to his penetration the motive of the inquiry; and he scorned to become subservient to other people's malice. I could have taught my enemies how to have obtained from Johnson that contempt of my compositions, which, for the power of repeating, their ill-will was on fire;—but it must have been effected by shrewder management than they were up to.

The last Gentleman's Magazine, or rather, the poor critic whom its ingenious and worthy editor employs in the poetic article, Midases it away most gloriously over our friend's noble descriptive poem, the Mount Blanc, presenting the palm it refuses him to one of the most veritable descendents of Sternhold and Hopkins, that ever blotted paper. It is thus that our Zoiluses to genius,

"Suckle fools, and chronicle small beer."

Believe me, dearest Madam, much gratified and honoured by what you said to Doctor Johnson upon my inquiries of him after Miss Susan Thrale, and that I am, on every account, your obliged and faithful servant.

LETTER VIII

Rev. Wm. Bagshot Stevens, of Repton, near Derby.

Lichfield, March 10, 1788.

It were indeed ungrateful if I could impute the gratifying opinion you express of my writings to disingenuous flattery, whatever check I may put upon self-love, by concluding you partial. Far from desiring to have such agreeable illusions dispersed, I take pride and pleasure in every proof of their continuance.

Your * sonnet is strikingly in the manner of Milton's sonnets,—to me scarcely less dear than his longer compositions.

* *The following is the sonnet alluded to, written by Mr Stevens.*

To him, whose taste with just and curious eye,
Compares the trophies of poetic praise,
By early Grecia won, with Latian lays,
Or ought of later date, that dares to vie,
Gallic, or Tuscan, with the classic frame
Of ancient genius; and to him, whose mind
Enkindled by the Muse's sacred flame,
Thinks into birth creations of its own,

I wish you would come and see us. Last summer gave me the pleasure of talking about you, and your muse, with Mr Shaw. Partaken enthusiams respecting the talents and merits of those we esteem, are very delightful to the mind.

Have you seen Boyd's translation of Dante? After reading, and comparing it with Mr Hayley's sublime English version of the three first cantos, we cannot place great confidence in Boyd's justice to his author. The inferiority of his translation of those cantos, is, on comparison, very impressive indeed.

Milton is said to have been indebted to the Inferno of Dante, for many of the striking features of his Pandemonium ;—but surely it is much more various, more grand, more sublime in its horror than the Inferno ; and the reproach of plagiarism is lost in the impression of that great superiority.

I am tempted to hazard a seeming vanity, by inserting the following verses, presented to me by that ingenious, learned, and able writer, Mr Pol-

Worthy immortal life ; great souls enshrin'd
Above earth's grosser sphere!—To such alone,
Like Hayley candid to a rival's claim,
Sole arbiters on criticism's throne,
The British muse brings, with triumphant aim,
Her richest tablet, grac'd with Seward's name.

wheel, whose didactic Poem on Eloquence, and Translations from the Classics, are so deservedly admired.

To Miss Seward.

*While friendship hails the rosy plume,
That wafts bright joy thro' † Wroxal's shade,
Say shall not gratitude illume
The breast that erst, its hopes to aid,
The muse of Lichfield cheer'd with genial ray
That gave th' unfolding blossoms into day?

Yes, to the sweetest of the choir
For whom attendant genius brings,
Caught from the sorrow-breathing lyre
All the rich music of its strings,
In vivid feeling the low notes shall rise,
And mix their numbers with self-doubting sighs.

And tho' the momentary strain
May feebly touch thy finer ear,
The tribute shall not flow in vain,
Which springs to truth, and virtue dear;
For then ingenuous merit heeds the lays,
Nor spurns at ought but unappropriate praise.

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* The first stanza alludes to a tribute of just praise, from the author of these letters to Mr Polwheel, on having read his Poem on Eloquence, in manuscript.—S.

† Wroxal, the name of the place where Mr Polwheel lived.—S.

E'en while a world's applausive charm
Bids thy pale André's closing breath
Revive, amid thy colours warm,
And triumph o'er opprobrious death;
And while that world may bid thy genius claim
The power to blazon Cook's immortal name.

Or while the universal voice
Shall hail thee the enthusiast child,
To whom, delighting in her choice,
Nature unveil'd her pictures wild,
And in Louisa flash'd along the lyre
A soul all fancy, and an eye all fire.

Still gratitude, her stores among,
Shall bid the plausive poet sing,
And, if the least of all the throng
That rise on the poetic wing,
Yet not regardless of his destin'd way,
If Seward's envied sanction stamp the lay.

Adieu Sir! and do not forget that Repton is only seventeen miles from Lichfield.

LETTER IX.

Rev. W. Crowe, Public Orator at Oxford, on his Poem, Lewesdon-Hill.

Lichfield, March 11, 1788.

Permit my grateful acknowledgement of a most welcome present, by which I think myself much honoured. My idea of the poetic, and musical talents of the donor, had been raised high by the song Seaton Cliffs. The hand of a master is discernible in its slightest sketch. The awful loneliness of marine scenery, with a blended sentiment of tenderness and intrepidity, breathe through the poetry, and through the music of that stanza.

Lewesdon-Hill fulfils the promise of excellence, made by its beautiful little harbinger. If I did not fear to be obtrusive, I should speak to you with more discrimination over its graces, that glow with Shakespearean and Miltonic tints.

My correspondent, Mr Hardinge, that witty son of Themis, lately sent me a few sweet lines of yours, which compare something, a fair nymph I suppose, to the lily of the valley. I have never

seen the coy beauties of that flower so happily described. Observe how we begin to collect your scattered pearls.

The Grecian and Latian muses have engrossed too many of your golden years. Henceforth may their British sister possess exclusively your poetic leisure. Her claim upon the genius which arose in her clime is indisputable; and she has allowed pretensions to dispute for that clime the palm of pre-eminence with the real Parnassus, and with the bowers of Mæcenas. They have given the world no epic poet superior to Milton, no dramatic one that, in inventive genius, and intuitive knowledge of the human heart, has any shadow of equality with Shakespeare.

"* Not Homer's self such matchless honours won,
The Greek had rivals, but our Shakespeare none."

I remain, Sir, &c.

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* See the Rev. Mr Seward's verses, written at Stratford-upon-Avon, in Dodsley's Miscellany. They are printed anonymously.—*S.*

LETTER X.

Mrs Piozzi.

Lichfield, March 13, 1788.

Again do I intrude upon your attention, dear Madam, to prove my obedience to your injunctions, that I should read and examine the Della Cruscas and Anna Matildas. But for your recommendation I should probably never have read them, being inserted in a magazine into which there is no looking without being shocked by some outrage or other against genius or worth.

I confess to you I did not like Mr Merry's Paulina. You saw that disapprobation in the coldness and hesitation with which I replied to your question, asked with an air of interest in the author that checked my ingenuousness.

Internal conviction is to me very impressive, that the Anna Matildas, as well as Della Cruscas, are Merry's; the seldom beauties and frequent blemishes of each being so exactly of the same complexion. To the best poems he gives the Della Crusca signature. The first six stanzas of the Elegy on the last day of the departed year,

are very pretty; the remaining sink into commonplace insipidity. The sonnet to Metastasio has that mixture of metaphor which is always wrong.

> " Ah once, or warm'd by hope, or chill'd by fear,
> I mark'd in doubtful joy thy wandering ray,
> Held the fair promise of the coming day,
> Then sunk beneath the sudden blow severe."

To *hold a promise* is strange awkward language. This sonnet makes Fortune, whom it addresses, a sun which, instead of sinking suddenly into eclipse, lifts up its hand and knocks him down. The simile of the steel, with which the sonnet concludes, is unintelligible, to me at least.

The Embarrassment is nothing like a sonnet, though it assumes that name; and the thought upon which it turns is quaint and old-fashioned.

The Ode to Horror, signed Anna Matilda, though it has enormous faults, forms, on the whole, a spirited imitation of Collins's Ode to Fear, though it by no means equals its original. Anna's poem to Indifference, with D. Crusca's answer to it, are each of them a twin-mixture of wild ideas and absurd appellations, illumined with flashes of poetic fire. Who would conceive that sensibility was meant to be addressed in the following verses?

"Savage untam'd! she smiles to drink our tears,
And where's no solid ill she wounds our fears."

Sensibility of all things an untam'd savage!!!—and she, who is indubitably the source of our tears, is made to drink them!—then what a senseless vulgar abbreviation of *where there is* no solid ill. The idea is a plagiarism from Beattie's Minstrel, miserably mangled in the expression. *There* is a true poet. See how beautifully he expresses the idea Mr Merry has so clumsily stolen from him!

"Fancy enervates while she soothes the heart,
And, while she dazzles, wounds the mental sight,
To joy a finer power she can impart,
But wraps the hour of woe in tenfold night;
And often, where no real ills affright,
Her visionary fiends, an endless train,
Assail with equal, or superior might,
And thro' the throbbing heart, and dizzy brain,
And shivering nerves shoot stings of more than mortal pain."
Minstrel.

I admire Mr Merry's poem to Mrs Siddons very much; we forgive imitation, however obvious, when the result is good. Here the imagery, in some parts, approaches that of its archetype, Collins's Ode on the Passions, in the portraits of horror, despair, and madness. That of revenge is al-

most verbatim from Collins; but the other three are sublime and more original. One is never weary of wondering, that the pen from which they sprung could fabricate the most nauseous of all poems, Paulina; though it certainly contains some fine passages. The pleasure they might afford is counteracted by those eternal vulgarisms that disgrace a style which aims at violent elevation.

I confess the opening admirable in its description of the castle, and the castle's lord, with the fine comparison of him to a rude rock in the Caspian Sea. The Russian scenery is at times drawn with a Salvatorial pencil.

These excellencies, however, make no adequate compensation for the disgusting horror of the story;—for the inevitable contempt we feel for the heroine, who could be induced to live in a state of odious and promiscuous prostitution, through a despicable desire of preserving her life from the fury of her father, after her imprudence had murdered her lover*. The despair of such a loss, and by means so horrid, would have set a mind of any elevation above every selfish fear!

* Forbidden by her tyrannical father to think of his daughter, she persuades him to enter her chamber window,—and hearing the old count coming to her apartment, she puts her lover into an iron chest; and when her father leaves her, she finds him—dead by suffocation.—*S.*

When I sent for Paulina last summer, on seeing it praised by the public critics, I sent also for another poem, that came out about the same time, which I had heard well spoken of by better judges, entitled, Edward, or the Curate. The authors of each were unknown to me, so I could have no prejudices in favour of the one, or against the other; yet, while Paulina disgusted, Edward charmed me. It is everywhere chaste, interesting, simple, natural, elegant, and pathetic. I grant there are two or three passages of higher elevation and real grandeur in the former;—but the general vulgarism, nauseousness, bombast, and absolute nonsense, were to me insupportable.

So Mr R—— is affronted not to find his name in your growler's letters. Astonishing, that any being, who knew Dr Johnson, should not have been thankful for such exemption! When he was last in Lichfield, he told me that a lady in London once sent him a poem which she had written, and afterwards desired to know his opinion of it. "Madam, I have not cut the leaves, I did not even peep between them. I met her again in company, and she again asked me after the trash. I made no reply, and began talking to another person. The next time we met, she asked me if I had yet read her poem; I answered, no, Madam, nor ever intend it."

Shocked at the unfeeling rudeness he thus recorded of himself, I replied, that I was surprised any person should obtrude their writings upon his attention; adding, that if I could write as well as Milton, or Gray, I should think the best fate to be desired for my compositions was exemption from his notice. I expected a sharp sarcasm in return, but he only rolled his large head in silence.

If the spirits of our noblest bards yet retain any solicitude for their earthly fame, either as poets or as men, they perhaps would like to have met the fate of Mr R——. I remain, dear Madam, yours, &c.

LETTER XI.

Mrs Cotton.

Lichfield, March 17, 1788.

The consciousness that your health is so much amended, comes across my mind in a glow of satisfaction. Those strong maternal desires that, unfulfilled from year to year, pined in the pain of longing, sapt the foundations of your health; which, I flatter myself, the sight and affectionate

attentions of your daughter will build up again. Your name in the dramatis personæ of Richmond House delighted as a good omen on that subject.

Alas! poor Mrs Style! I hoped to have felt my heart expand again and again in the warm benevolence which shone out in her countenance, and in her manners. I should yet more regret that you have lost her, had you not told me that clouds of causeless dejection were apt to involve, and, during long intervals, darken its light. The idea of a friend's sufferings, so painful to us while they are endured, becomes lenient and consolatory when it hovers over their sepulchre; yet must you long feel a dreary vacuity in Lady Faie's circle. Local circumstances are great nourishers of regret.

> "When to the old elm's wonted shade return'd,
> Then, then I miss'd my vanish'd friend—and mourn'd."

It is peculiarly proper that I should condole with you on the loss of your friend this day—for it is the 17th of March; the birth-day of my lovely long-deceased sister, who died in her nineteenth year—"a fair flower soon cut down on our fields. The spring returned with its showers, but no leaf of her's arose:"—yet does not my heart forget this day, which gave to life an amiable creature, who shed the light of joy over many of my youth-

ful years. Many are fled since she vanished from earth. Time balms sorrow, and there is a joy in grief when the soul is at peace. But I am conscious there are deprivations, the wound of which no time can balm. Then it is that anguish wastes the mournful, and their days are few. Heaven preserve my heart, and the hearts of all I love, from the corrosive impression of such a woe!

Here is nothing to be called news which can interest you. Some of us are grown very fine. The ——'s and ——'s, whom you remember contentedly moving in general equality with their neighbours, have, amidst their, of late years, improving fortunes, taken great state upon themselves; affect to live in what they call style; to associate chiefly with Lords and Esquires of high degree in the environs. They think, no doubt, that thus externally elevating themselves, they *shall* excite the envy of their neighbours, that darling triumph of contracted minds. They certainly do excite it amongst the many who would act the same part if they had the same golden means. But there are two classes of people who look down upon such low-souled ambition, and all its silly ostentations;—the religious and the literary. Earthly parade can draw no jealous glances from eyes that are often lifted up to Heaven; and the votaries of intellectual

and lettered pleasures, look upon their lacquies and lords, their strutting and their style, with as undazzled and untroubled eyes as eagles can be supposed to cast on glow-worms, when they have been recently gazing on the sun.

LETTER XII.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 9, 1788.

HERE are copies of those two letters of mine, of former years, which you expressed a desire to possess, when I shewed them to you on your last visit to Lichfield. The first, addressed to the present Mrs Stokes, when she was unmarried, about the year 1781, for there is no date to the original, which she has lent me to transcribe for you.

" There is no contending with our fate, my dear Miss Rogers.—We must obey the time, and, amidst the press of our mutual avocations, submit to repose upon our certainty of each other's regard, with whatever seldomness our pens may witness it.

"I conceive the pleasure you must feel in the intoxicating activity of the chace. Our enjoyments depend almost as much upon the nature of our bodily organization, as upon the temper of our minds. Had I the fairy lightness of your form, and had escaped the accident which put a period, at twenty-three, to all equestrian exercise, I should feel great delight in mounting a fleet steed, and feeling him bear me, with bounding rapidity, over the hills. I remember the sensation of freedom and independence which I used to feel on horseback. In early rides, when the newly risen summer-sun,

> "With wheels yet hovering o'er the ocean-brim,
> Shot parallel to the earth his dewy ray;"

and amidst the dance of spirits, which youth and health, vegetable fragrance, and landscapes shining in the first lustre of the dawn, inspired, I used to say to myself, I have taken the wings of the morning, and will fly.

"Amidst your partial praise of the * Monody on André, it is comical to see you complaining upon paper of want of powers for such a task. The matter comes to this, my pretty friend;—

* Then recently published.

your youth and beauty, and the homage they excite, form a spell more powerful to influence the disposition of your time, than can be produced by the hope of augmenting your literary reputation.

" Dr Russel is right; neither your ode or mine can properly be called a translation of the * Arabian ode. Each of us felt the necessity of adding the expansion of metaphor, the introduction of collateral circumstances, and a sort of moral ap-

* *Dr Russel's literal Translation of an Arabian Ode.*

My body is toss'd on the couch,
My mind is agitated with thought;
The night appears long to me,
For my heart is broken.

The stars succeed one another
In the blue firmament;
The fire of love is in my bosom,
Which all the waters in the sea cannot quench.

Poetic Paraphrase of the above, by Miss Rogers.

I.

In vain my body on the couch is laid,
In vain gay poppies round my tent entwine,
These sleepless eyes still ask my lovely maid,
In vain they ask—no gleam of hope is mine;
Thou radiant moon, ye stars that glitter bright,
Not all your rays can cheer a lover's night.

plication of them to the situation of the complainant. Without these sort of embellishments, a poem cannot deserve its name. The novel sounds

II.

In vain soft stillness marks the temperate hours,
And murmuring streams invite to soft repose;
In vain the breezes from the drooping flowers
Steal balmy fragrance as their beauties close;
The fires of love within my bosom rage,
Which ocean's mighty waves can ne'er assuage.

III.

Sweet nightingale, suspend thy thrilling song,
Nor strive to charm this agitated breast;
Spite of thy dulcet lay the night is long,
Nor thy soft magic soothes my soul to rest;
Lost as I am, I hug the fatal chain,
My heart is broken, for my vows are vain.

Anna Seward's Paraphrase of the Arabian Ode.

Wide o'er the drowsy world incumbent night,
Sullen and drear, his sable wing has spread;
The waning moon, with interrupted light,
Gleams cold and misty on my fever'd bed.
Cold as she is, to her my breaking heart
Shall pour its waste of woes, its unavailing smart.

Thro' the long hours,—alas, how long the hours!
My restless limbs no grateful languors know;
Griev'd tho' I am, yet grief's assuaging showers
From burning eye-balls still refuse to flow;
Love's jealous fires, kindled by Aza's frown,
Not the vast wat'ry world, with all its waves, can drown.

of a remote language certainly rendered Dr Russel very partial to this specimen of Arabic poetry. He owns that the point is simply, 'all the waters of the sea cannot quench love.' This is a hackneyed idea in every language. It was natural that Dr Russel should be pleased to find it expressed in Arabic. We like to perceive the universal congeniality of human nature, and that the same passions produce similar ideas in every soil and clime;—but can he think that a close translation of this little composition would be worth any thing as an English poem?

"You remember the beautiful translation in the Spectator of the Lapland odes! I was once shewn a close translation of them, and copied it. There was much richer matter to work upon in the Lapland poems; yet the author of the Spectator-paraphrases found it advantageous, if not necessary, to strengthen into visibility those ideas which, in a version nearly literal, are seen but as through a glass darkly; and also to add some

Slow pass the stars along the night's dun plain,
Still in their destin'd spheres serene they move,
Nor does their soft effulgence shine in vain,
Like the fierce blazes of neglected love;
But life's last pangs dissolve the galling chain;
Aza, a broken heart defies thy proud disdain!

thoughts and images, of which no trace can be found in the originals, however exquisitely in keeping with the Lapland character, soil, and climate, as they appear to us in the ruder and faithful translations *, which you will find inclosed. After you have read them, have the goodness to reperuse the graceful lovely paraphrases of them in the Spectator. The fourth stanza of the second ode has great beauty in the close translation. The eulogium on summer is too much curtailed in the Spectator-version; but then there is a thought added, which makes ample recompence, viz.

"Tis mad to go—tis death to stay,
Away to Aura, haste away!"

But to return to our Arabian poem.—

"This is the second time that you and I have written upon the same subject. It is little to the purpose of ascertaining the right of superiority between us, that we are mutually desirous of resigning the palm to each other, like Peter and the friar their *snipe* in the ballad of tragi-comical memory. That palm will be shifted from my brow to yours, and *vice-versa*, as the taste of the

* The translations here mentioned are printed in Lord Kames's Sketches on Man.

reader shall lean to the delicate or the strong, the sombre or the beautiful. Adieu!"

COPY OF A LETTER, ADDRESSED TO MISS WESTON, FROM LICHFIELD, SEPT. 6, 1783.

"SOOTHING and welcome to me, dear Sophia, is the regret you express for our separation. Pleasant were the weeks we have recently passed together in this ancient and embowered mansion. I had strongly felt the silence and vacancy of the depriving day on which you vanished, only that I was obliged to attend to the preparations for accompanying my dearest father on our journey into the Peak; but that attention was blended with many a sigh, the pensive tribute to severed amity. How prone are our hearts perversely to quarrel with the friendly coercion of employment, at the very instant in which it is chasing the torpid and injurious mists of unavailing melancholy.

"It grieves me to see you acknowledging that your brother is more injured than was apprehended by that wretch, who sheltered the barbarous ruin he meditated upon the son of his friend, to whom he owed obligations, under an impious

pretence of gratitude to that deceased friend.—O Sophia, 'were the be-all and the end-all here,' the Almighty Maker of the universe could not be just. But reason renders audible the solemn word Retribution, in every sigh which she breathes over human baseness. The sacred voice of Revelation is not necessary to inform us of that truth, however useful and consoling in the confirmation. Nature's hand has impressed the consciousness on every bosom.

"I wonder not at the indignation you express at Johnson's injustice to your darling Gray. It is generous, it is grateful, and due to the delight you have taken in his compositions. Why does Mr Mason suffer this Fe Fa Fum of literature, that snuffs afar the fame of his brother-authors, and thirsts for its destruction, to peer and gallop unmolested over the fields of criticism? A few pebbles from the well-springs of truth and eloquence, slung by a strong and agile arm, would soon bring the might of his envy low. To fancy's eye the injured shade of Gray rises sternly before Mason,

"And calls for vengeance from his tardy hand."

"You will be surprised to hear that we staid only a fortnight at * Eyam. We were received

* A village in the high peak of Derbyshire, of which Mr Seward was rector, and where his daughter was born.—S.

by our old friends and neighbours, with such warm and affectionate welcome, as made me wish to have tarried one month, at least, among my native rocks; besides, I had the additional pleasure of dear Miss Rogers' society. She came to me before breakfast, for she had flown, on her light steed, over the mountains which separate Dronfield from Eyam, on the wings of the dawn; —nor did she leave me till my father determined we should set our faces to the south. A buck from Lord Donegall was the magnet which drew my beloved back to Lichfield, in spite of mine, and Miss R.'s, and all our neighbour's intreaties for a longer residence. I left Eyam with the more regret, from a melancholy presentiment that the advanced age of its pastor, and the dangerous seizures to which he is subject, would make it his last visit.*

"The dear little muse was very sprightly and happy. The fair prospect of a union, which mutual love, congenial talents, and genteel competency conspire to gild, may well give to her eyes the glow of placid smiles, to her spirits the dance of joy. She often persuaded me to ex-

* It proved the last, though Mr S. survived that visit seven years, but in a state too feeble to leave his home at Lichfield.—*S.*

plore, with her, the heights of those near mountains, which, high as it stands itself, yet tower above our village, and shew us from their summits, beyond the lesser hills, the rich vale of Chastsworth, and immediately look upon the more romantic beauties of Stoke. I was astonished at my own strength and courage in these ascending and descending enterprises. Frequently and fervently did we wish for you. 'How Sophia would be charmed!' was an exclamation for ever on our lips.

"Doctor Browne of Sheffield, who lives to promote the good, and the pleasures of others, brought us for one day the two younger, and twin-sisters of Miss Rogers. What a wonderful resemblance of face and form between all the three! there is not a straw's difference in their height; all of them little, slender, and agile. The sight of so many partners of our late interesting tour, through this sublime county, recalled, in vivid traits, all its enchantment. By that association of ideas, which their persons, and the similarity of scenes produced, I found myself perpetually impelled to turn my head, and look for the rest of the party;—but ah! there was much embittering regret in the consciousness, with which the succeeding instant dashed back upon my heart that involuntary expectation. They for whom I looked

were far away, nor did the ascending hill present the graceful form of Sophia, or the rocks echo the matchless songs of * Giovanni.

"You have heard me speak of a steep, narrow, romantic and grassy dell, whose brow the middle part of our village borders. A ridge of curtained rocks rises opposite, thrusting their bare grey points here and there through the foliage. One of them is excavated, and forms a gallery, which may be descended into from the upper heights of the village, whence the cliffs and fields, which stretch over the summits of those rocks, are of easy access. It was in this rocky gallery that Mr Mompessan, the rival in virtue of Marseilles' good bishop, preached to his parishioners of this populous and large village, when it was visited by the plague in the year 1666; rationally concluding, that assembling in a close church would be likely to increase the infection. The descent into this dell, from the centre of the village, is a smooth steep turf, scattered with single pine and ash-trees. The level turf at the bottom scarce exceeds six yards in breadth. After winding to the right, about a quarter of a mile, it terminates in the celebrated Middleton-dale, or as it ought to be called, as belonging to Eyam parish, Eyam-

* Mr Saville.

dale:—that scene where the awful and terrible Graces only dwell;—though the barren rocks and desert cliffs, their residence, are picturesque and grand, from their stupendous height, and variety of forms; broken and ravaged as too many of them have been, and continue to be, by the force of gunpowder, destroying them for the purpose of mending the roads with their materials. The burning lime-kilns, of which there are several in the dale, deform it in the day-time with their smouldering fires, but are fine in the night, shewing glimpses of the savage scene by the light of their volcanic flames;—but I have strayed from the verdant glen without intending it, just as I purposed to tell you, that the three smart little sisters and myself, escorted by Doctor Browne, and our friend Mr Longston of Eyam, descended into this glen beneath the soft beams of a golden evening. Long ere my slow steps, supported on each side by the two gentleman, had gained the midway descent, the three sister-nymphs had bounded to the bottom. The little muse's imagination instantly conceived the magic effect which their tiny, light, and airy forms, so similar, and so nimble, would have to us, whose sight dropt from an eminence which yet more diminished them. They instantly began dancing the hays with much swiftness in the grassy bottom. Their habits exactly

alike, their hair floating on the gale, their hats, whose waving plumes were so graceful in the dance!—nothing but the beams of Cynthia, instead of those of the setting Phœbus, was wanting to have realized

"The fairy revel in the moonlight glade."

"One sunny morning, my father took Miss Rogers and myself, in the chaise, four miles of the most dreary part of our county, over the summits of some bare, wild hills, deformed by stone walls, the ashes of mines, and the smoke of lime-kilns. At length arose before us a cluster of high, round, and beautiful mountains, covered with underwood, and intersecting each other in the boldest manner. Approaching the brow of the nearest, sunk at a vast depth beneath, we beheld that lovely Mensodale, of which I have spoken to you so often. It is more beautiful than the vale of Matlock, because it has still softer features; much more of the smiling charms of pasturage and corn-fields; while the rocky mountains, which embosom it, are not less sublime. The river Wye, of the most lucid clearness, is as large and finely fringed on its banks, as the Derwent at Matlock. It winds through the softest,

brightest, and most plenteous meadows that poetic fancy could picture. They are narrow, it is true, but that circumstance makes them lovelier, from the umbrageous richness which is produced by the sweet nut-hedges which divide them. The eye pursues this glassy river about a mile on its meandering course; it reflects all the gadding branches on its bank, as in a mirror, for its depth, and the height from which we view it, prevents the current from being visible. The river then loses itself to the eye on this its first hawk's view of the dale, amongst the intersecting mountains. The valley, about half a mile broad, runs into a length of more than two miles; the scenes assuming new and varied graces, along the course of the river.

"While my father went to pay a visit some three miles onward, Miss R. and myself, escorted by Mr Longston, ventured on foot, by a winding path, down the steep mountain. That descent was the most arduous of my late attempts. Behold us in safety at the bottom of the dale, and pursuing the course of the river till it falls, about six feet, down some steep and broken rocks, that divide the streams into a number of currents, forming, not indeed a grand, but one of the most beautiful cascades I ever saw,

"Of wanton waters, volatile, and free."

Our leave of absence not permitting us to pursue the enchanting ramble, we returned to scale those heights which we had so lately descended. The ascent, however laborious, was not only less dangerous, but less difficult to me than going down. My father, having paid his visit, reached the brow of the mountain a few minutes before us. He received his wanderers with blazing cheeks, short respiration, and enthusiastic exclamations over the charms of that scenery which we had with so much pleasure explored.

" We dined, and passed one day at Edenzor, with good Mr Barker. My swain was there, more ardently attentive than ever. He seems impressed with the most passionate tenderness for me, in this the summer of his youth. 'Tis an odd fancy—even him whom I remember to have caressed when an infant, and to have corrected too with all the girlish love of power and authority—there is about thirteen years between us—on the wrong side—what a caprice of the heart!—It is well for our future happiness, that mine is not influenced by a congenial spell.

" During this residence amongst my native mountains, we had either company, or went out to dinner every day. You know what a social being is my dearest father. Shook as his frame has been, his mind has lost, as yet, none of its

energy*. Nothing could less resemble retirement. Our stay so short, I too much desired the company of my old friends and neighbours, to permit the wish of that sequestration, so dear to me in scenes like those, silent, vast, and awful.

"Are you not fond of the bounded horizon of a mountainous country, where the situation, whether high or low, looks up to grand elevations in several points of view? There the eye can always find a brown or green mass, on which to repose. I always perceive vision much more clear and distinct, when the light descends thus perpendicularly upon the eye-lids, rather than assails their undefended orbits in every direction at once, as it must do amid the wide-stretched plains of an open country. There we are always entirely in the untempered whiteness of light, or must seek its chastizement either by near walls, or trees, or by the jailish gloom of Venetian blinds; all of them excluding with the sun every object it gilds; or, if abroad,

"Must hie to thick damp groves, whose unpierc'd shade
Embrowns the noon-tide scene."

I should suppose, that the visual powers of the inhabitants must be stronger, and more en-

* The reader will recollect this letter was written in 1783.—S.

during, in a mountainous than in a flat country; but know not if experience has ascertained the probability.

"Miss Powys past last Tuesday here in her road to the Cheshire Lady Holt's. She had made a longer stay with me, but concluding us at Eyam, had settled her plans differently. Her manners recalled your idea every instant. She is entirely of your class. In the year 1770, she passed a delightful month with Honora, Giovanni, and myself, in the dear blue region, as the lost Major André used to call my dressing-room, for there we were all day but at meal-times. Except in public, she had not seen Giovanni in that long long interval. She ever esteemed him, affectionately as you esteem him. Judge of the gladness with which they met, after such an age of absence! Virtuous friendship, how pure, how sacred are thy delights!—Sophia, thy mind is capable of tasting them in all their poignance; against how many of life's painful incidents may that capacity be considered as a counterpoise! Sincerely do I wish, that, in future, its joys may come to you pure and unbalanced by any weight in the dark scale of misfortune. Adieu."

LETTER XIII.

H. Repton, Esq. on the Publication of his Essays entitled Variety.

Lichfield, March 30, 1788.

I am charmed with your book, my every way ingenious friend; nor must you suspect my sincerity, when I assure you, that I find more which appears to me witty, humorous, and entertaining in this little volume, than in any single one of the so long boasted Spectators. It is excessively in their style, and less clogged with heavy uninteresting matter. There are certainly many charming things in the Spectators; but I do not think so highly of their ingenuity in the aggregate as is customary to speak. They appear to me often dull where they aim at wit:—yet Addison's talent for easy humour is happy. He does not, however, seem to me an energetic moralist, or a very discerning critic on works of poetic genius. His serious oratory wants the nerve and the splendour of imagination which adorns that of Johnson; though Johnson, as a critic, is worse than feeble, he is detestable; and this amidst the

dazzling metaphors and pointed sarcasms which he employs so lavishly in his envious designs to mislead the public taste—designs which have proved deplorably successful.

Addison, though superficial where he means to analyze genius, is too generally just in his praise, and candid in his censures, ever, or at least often, to mislead his readers, as to the general estimation in which they ought to hold the writer on whose compositions he descants. The literary eminence on which he stood, enabled him to awaken the attention of the world to one of the greatest poets it ever produced; whose works, to its never to be forgotten disgrace, had lain neglected so many years.

But to resume your new-born volume. Its title, Variety, is well sustained; and the sprightly references which the work continually bears to it, have reconciled me entirely to the appellation, though I still confess my regret, that this composition did not appear in single numbers, which would have given that natural air to the letters which is so advantageous.

How gracefully sportive the first paper, now and then sliding into a shade of agreeable seriousness; and in the sixth number, the country sports are described with picturesque vivacity.

It is so much the whim of the times, amidst practical licentiousness of every kind, to demand from modern authors an unrelaxing prudery of ideas and language, that I confess I tremble for some of the little husband's expressions; for your vindication of innocent recreations on Sunday evening, succeeding to the public worship of the day, and for the temerity of your quixotism upon the new religious wind-mill, lest, (as Lovelace says upon a different application of the same allusion,) "its plaguy air-fans" toss your book out of popular favour.

A sweet melancholy interest chains us to the pages of the convent story. Its style and manner please me, and the concluding passage conveys a striking truth in unaffected majesty of language.

I perceive the genuine glow of a fine imagination in the new and beautiful Chinese Story. The Hall of Silence is sublimely conceived; and the moment in which the veils are removed, presents an happy subject to the historic pencil.

I feel great satisfaction in the approbation you express of my strictures in defence of Richardson, against the injustice of Mr Cumberland. They are honoured in the situation you have assigned them in this your ingenious book; but

what shall I say to you about the reasonless reason you allege for not giving them any critical brethren in that volume? I must either blush for your partiality, or lour over the sarcasm of mock-compliment. It shall be the first; for my spirit, liking summer better than winter, prefers the glow to the cloud.

I am sorry to find any thing like satire and sarcasm in this volume, upon the late elegant and amiable institution at Bath-Easton; and I trust my regret has a worthier source than in the wounded vanity of a myrtle-wreathed poet. There was a classic grace and spirit in the institution itself, which the frequent stupidity of its candidates could not do away. It should have been remembered, that Hayley, Anstey, Jerningham, Whalley, and Potter deigned to contend for its verdant prize. It deserved the praise, not the ridicule, of men of genius, who ought to wish respectability to its memory, that other people of fortune might catch the enthusiasm, and invite our rising youth to fairer ambition than that of the fox-chace, the turf, and the gaming-table.

So much for censure.—Were I to comment upon all that has pleased me in this little work, a quire of paper would be limit too narrow; and, with a violent cough, and inflamed lungs, I

must not indulge my recollections too lavishly.—Adieu!

LETTER XIV.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 9, 1788.

I HAVE sincere and frequent pleasure in reflecting that your long journey is not likely to be in vain, respecting the interesting purpose for which it was undertaken. As it happened, you hardly need to have run away from the hybernal rigours. It has been with us the mildest winter since that for which I paid my acknowledgements in verse to the sun.

You will for my sake, be kindly glad, that my dearest father yet exists, and that one apoplectic fit has been the only alarm he gave us through the winter. My inflammatory cough has also very civilly absented itself; and I have endeavoured to follow your good advice, which, by observing, we may live so many more years, without growing older by their addition; but I find it easier to prevail on myself to anticipate the tardy

dawn of the dreary mornings, than on our servants to give me the comfortable means of enlivening their darkness.

Within these six weeks, Mr ——— has piqued me again into a suspension of our correspondence. If there had been any moderation in his attentions, he has wit enough to have made me sorry.

One of his last packets inclosed a letter from a friend, dated Rome. It describes that ever-interesting city, and its environs, with an animated accuracy, that places me in one of their highest elevations, and shews me the relics of ancient magnificence; her splendid modern palaces—the immense plain that spreads so wide around her; and, amidst her distant and mountainous horizon, the Soracte, immortalized by Horace, in full view, and white with the snows he describes.

When I read of your purposed tour to Madrid and Valladolid, I felt that thrill, which, from the operation of enthusiasm upon associated ideas, brings water into the eyes, and which I have often seen you feel. Few sensations are so pleasant. Of these thrills of sensibility, I hope you will have many, as you journey onward, to reward the fatigues and inconveniencies of the expedition.

Mr Hayley has seldom received an higher or more delicate compliment, than that conveyed in your manner of inquiring after him. I heard from him lately; he is well, but speaks not of any literary work upon the anvil; yet, as he tells me, he writes very few letters. I conclude there is one; a genius, creative and facile as his, cannot slumber in the plenteous leisure of his chosen retirement.

Curiosity to see the Pageant of mock justice in Westminster-Hall, drew him to town for a short time. Mine is but little awakened over the fuss, parade, and national expence of this unmeaning scrutiny. Justice has nothing to hope from the flames of senatorial philippics, that are kindled on every side of the accused; but as for the vanity of the incendiaries, over the brightness of their oratoric blaze, it is not so with them;—that vanity has much to hope from a theme so fruitful in pathos and in horror.

This trial prevents the Abbey music this year. So inadequately are the performers rewarded, that most of them will be glad. Mr Saville crows over the idea of being, in consequence, at liberty to pay his devoirs to Flora, during the weeks in which she holds her courts of vernal preparation, well knowing, that when they are duly attended,

she is as bountiful of her gems, as the Cecilia would have been niggardly with her guineas. He is much flattered by your kind remembrance. His daughter's concert-room, to the profits of which you so kindly contributed, was very full,—her own performance that evening sweet and applauded.

Last week, your friend, Mr Crowe, and my friend, Mr Whalley, took the literary field, much to the honour of both. Mr C.'s Lewesdon Hill is in blank-verse, and often wears the Shakespearean, and often the Miltonic air; and also breathes no inconsiderable portion of their charming spirit; but I am talking to you of a work with which you are, probably, perfectly acquainted. He was so good to send me a Lewesdon. In my letter of thanks, I ventured to express the admiring esteem in which I held his muse. I wish he may not feel a little scholastic scorn over the presumption of such praise.

And now, ere I say adieu, I must fight you a little more upon the old ground. I feel a zeal, something like that of patriotism, for the honour of my own times, since I also feel assured, that their claim to poetic splendour transcends that of any former period. What you say, however, is perfectly just about the lack of poetic patronage. In that respect, but in that only, is our age less

Augustan than that of Anne. But impartial comparison can demonstrate, that all sort of fine writing is in much greater abundance. Perhaps that very abnndance forms the chief reason why genius is so much less distinguished than it was in those days. Its radiant lights, running into confluence, are not so conspicuous as when they were fewer in number. The times of Swift and Pope had no lyric poet. Ours have four very resplendent ones, Collins, Gray, Mason, and Warton. One of those four, considering the superiority of his subjects to those of Pindar, and the at least equality of his imagery and numbers, may fairly be styled the greatest lyrist the world has produced. Shenstone excelled all his rivals in the pastoral walk. In professed satire, we have a Juvenal and an Horace in Churchill and Johnson; since, though the former was Johnson's model, the polished elegance of his verse is Horatian; while a new species of satire, in the heroic epistles of Mason, has perhaps hit the true tone of satire better than any of them. In blank-verse, Cowper disputes the palm with Thomson in his descriptions; with Young, in the nervous rage of moral philippics. Surely Mr Hayley's verse breathes a more creative and original genius, than even the brilliant Pope, who excels him in nothing but in the high and laboured po-

lish of his enchanting numbers; while Mr H.'s prose has the ease and wit of Addison, with much more strength and spirit. Amidst all Johnson's faults, the greatness of his abilities has amazed and dazzled the whole literary world. Then, what a mine of original wit are the writings of Sterne? How brilliant in that property the comedies of Hayley and Sheridan! To the names of all these eminent men, that have adorned the last half century, we may add those of Akenside, Lyttleton, Beattie, Langhorne, Dr Warton, Holme, Jephson, Jerningham, Owen, Cambridge, Whalley, and our new star, Mr Crowe, to say nothing of our many Sapphos to the single one of Pope's time.—Surely, surely you are prejudiced against our day a little, after the manner in which Lord Shaftesbury was prejudiced against his, who asserts, in the Characteristics, that the period which you call transcendent, was wholly barren of genius and wit.

And now for closing this voluminous epistle.

May the eyes for which it is intended shine upon its blotted pages in the serene light of health and cheerfulness!—Yours.

LETTER XV.

Miss Scott.

Lichfield, April 13, 1788.

Alas! dear Miss Scott, (for I must write to you once more ere you resign that name which I have long valued) my heart sympathizes with you in the mournful sense of privation resulting from the total dissolution of the filial ties. Mine yet subsist; but it is by so attenuated a thread, that I live in hourly apprehension of shedding hopeless tears for the loss of one of the sweetest and most interesting satisfactions the human bosom can feel.

I shall be glad to learn that a new situation, new cares, new duties, have combined to occupy your mind, and to leave it less leisure for unavailing regrets. I dare assure myself Mr Taylor will make you a kind husband. His fine understanding and strict piety are guarantees for your future peace; his temper had severe trials in the sacrifices you made of his happiness to the surely unreasonable opposition of a parent. Your health has doubtless suffered much from the conflicts you endured—and we may hope much amend-

ment in that important source of comfort from their cessation; while the doubts you have felt and expressed for your happiness as a wife, increase my trust on that head. Disappointment is a prime source of the woes of wedlock. Dangerous are those partial hopes and dependencies which frail mortality can so seldom fulfil.

I begin to be impatient for your poem on the sacred character of the Messiah. Need I say with what presentiments in its favour I shall open the leaves?

No, dear Miss Scott, I shall not be in London this long time. There is no leaving my dearest father; and should he soon bid me an eternal farewell, I could not quit Lichfield till I had settled my little household in an habitation better suited to my fortune and my singleness, which would be much out of their place in a palace. But never can any other home be dear to me as this. No local attachment can be more passionate than mine to these walls and bowers that seem to wear the resemblance, and breathe the spirit of all that I have loved. Adieu.

LETTER XVI.

MISS WESTON.

Lichfield, April. 15, 1788.

YOUR letter, dear Sophia, is full of entertaining matter, adorned with the wonted grace and vivacity of your style. For the payment of such debts our little city is not responsible.

I ought, however, to speak to you of an extraordinary Being who ranged amongst us during the winter, since he bears your name amongst us little folk, I mean, for he was by no means calculated to the meridian of our pompous gentry; though, could he once have been received into their circle, they would perhaps have endured his figure and his profession, and half forgive the superiority of his talents, in consideration of his extreme fondness for every game at cards, and of his being an admirable whist-player.

The profession of this personage is music, Organist of Solihull in Warwickshire; in middle life; his height and proportion mighty slender, and well enough by nature, but fidgeted and noddled into an appearance not over preposses-

sing; nor are his sharp features and very sharp little eyes a whit behind them in quizzity. Then he is drest—ye gods, how he is drest!—in a salmon-coloured coat, sattin waistcoat, and small-clothes of the same warm aurora-tint; his violently protruded chitterlin, more luxuriant in its quantity, and more accurately plaited than B. B.'s itself, is twice open hemmed.

That his capital is not worth a single hair he laments with a serio-comic countenance, that would make a cat laugh—and, in that ingenuousness with which he confesses all his miserable vanities, as he emphatically calls them, he tells us that he had frizzed off the scanty crop three thousand years ago.

This loss is however supplied by a wig, for the perfection of which he sits an hour and half every day, under the hands of the frizzeur, that it may be plumed out like a pigeon upon steady and sailing flight—and it is always powdered with marechall,

"Sweet to the sense, and yellow to the sight."

A hat furiously cocked and pinched, too small in the crown to admit his head, sticks upon the extremest summit of the full-winged caxon.

His voice has a scrannel-tone—his articulation is hurried, his accent distinguished by Staffordshire provinciality; and it is difficult to stand his bow with any discipline of feature. He talks down the hours, but knows nothing of their flight; eccentric in that respect, and Parnassian in his contempt of the precision of eating-times as Johnson himself.

Now look on the other side the medal. His wit, intelligence, and poetic genius are a mine; and his taste and real accuracy in criticism enable him to cut the rich ore they produce brilliant.

He knows of every body, and has read every thing. With a wonderfully retentive memory, and familiar with the principles of all the sciences, his conversation is as instructive as it is amusing; for his ideas are always uncommon and striking, either from absolute originality, or from new and happy combination.

His powers of mimickry, both in singing and speaking, are admirable. Nobody tells a humorous story better; but, in narrating interesting facts, his comments, though always in themselves worth attention, often fatigue by their plenitude, and by the suspense in which we are held concerning the principal events.

The heart of this ingenious and oddly com-

pounded being, is open, ardent, and melting as even female-tenderness; and we find in it a scrupulous veracity, and an engaging dread of being intrusive. He has no vices, and much active virtue. For these good dispositions, he is greatly respected by the genteel families round Solihull, and (for his comic powers doubtless) his society is much sought after by them.

Hither while he staid in Lichfield did he often come. Indeed I found myself perpetually seduced, by his powers of speeding time, to give up more of that fast-fleeting possession to him than I could conveniently spare.

Our first interview proved, by mistake, embarrassing and ridiculous. Mr Dewes being upon a visit to me, he and I were soberly weighing, in our respective balances, the quantity of genius that enriched the reign of Anne, and the liberal portions of it that our own times may boast.

It was evening, the grey hour, that "flings half an image on the straining sight." Comparing the dead and the living, by *other* light than that of candles, we had not called for them.

In bolts our servant Edward, who had seen as indistinctly as I was about to see. "Madam, here's young Mr Weston."—"Indeed!" exclaimed I, and starting up, rushed towards the person-

age who followed him, crying out, " dear Joe I am vastly glad to see you."—" My name *is* Joseph Weston, Madam." The devil it is, thought I, for the voice, and the accompanying wriggle with which he bowed very low, were not our Joe's voice or bow.

" Lord bless me, Sir," said I, drawing back, " I have a friend of your name, for whom, in this dusky hour, I took you." He then told me that he had lately passed an evening with Mr Saville, who had kindly assured him I should pardon an intrusion which had been the wish of years.

From that period, October last, Weston has been much in Lichfield, where genius and merit are, to the generality of its inhabitants, as dust in the balance against inferior station and exterior inelegance. Yet within these walls, and at our theatre, this finical but glowing disciple of the muses, passed many animated hours.

He has the theatric mania upon him, in all its ardour. The inclosed very ingenious prologue he taught Roxwell, who has a fine person and harmonious voice, to speak very delightfully.

I by no means think with you on the general abuse of the higher powers of mind, or respecting their proving injurious to the happiness of their possessor. I have generally, though not always, found, that where there is most genius there is

most goodness; and the inexhaustible sources of delight that, closed to common understandings, are open to elevated ones, must inevitably tend to give them a superior degree of happiness.

Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides has been long too much my admiration, in point of elegance, for me to think with you, that the letters from Scotland, in Mrs Piozzi's publication, however charming, are to be named with it in the strength or in graces of style.

So Miss P—— can now say with Eloisa—

"Rise Alps between us, and whole oceans roll."

May the heroic spirit of this enterprize be as much for her happiness as it is to her honour!—Adieu.

LETTER XVII.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 17, 1788.

THANK you, my dear bard, for a letter whose kindness in some degree recompensed its long delay; while, for your exceedingly kind endeavours

to gratify the almost sole surviving wish of my poor father's heart, mine pays you acknowledgements upon which there are no regretful drawbacks.

My ingenious and very learned correspondent Mr Dewes, is upon the Continent for his health. In his last letter he thus asks after one of our mutual acquaintance, and yourself. I transcribe this inquiring passage, because I think it pays one of those just and delicate compliments to your genius, not less worthy of it than higher-coloured, or more laboured eulogiums.—" I am concerned, as a friend, to hear of the welfare of Mr Dea, and, as an Englishman, of that of Mr Hayley—mention them both when you write."

We have here two young poets, one the second son of a gentleman of family, and of the name of Lister, lately settled in this city, the other of an officer, called Cary, living at Sutton Coldfield. Their age equal, just turned fifteen—their attachment and delight in each other generously enthusiastic.

They received their last three years' instruction from an ingenious schoolmaster at Sutton; though Cary is now removed to Birmingham school, previous to his going to the university. Lister, on account of an unfortunate hesitation in his speech; which forbids the pursuit of an oratoric profession, is placed with our eminent banker, Mr Cobb.

They have pursued their studies with emulative ardour, and after having, for some time past, amused themselves, in the recesses of the school-hours, with translating Moschus, Bion, and Horace, into English verse, they now write original odes, and also sonnets, upon the Miltonic model; and with success that is quite miraculous in years so blossoming.

If you looked into the last Gentleman's Magazine, you saw a sonnet of Cary's addressed to yourself. Lister writes very sweetly for such a youth, but I think Cary's vein the richer. I inclose specimens of each.

In the course of last summer, Cary wrote an irregular ode to Lord Heathfield, after the manner of Horace's panegyrics upon the heroes of his day. Like them, it contains some very poetic passages, and the numbers are uniformly harmonious; but, like them also, being without plan, and the allusions, as theirs, rather shadowy than distinct, it interests only those few readers who feel delight in observing how early it is possible to be a master of numbers, and to catch a portion of the Horatian spirit.

His sonnets are more perfect of their kind—and must, I should imagine, please every reader who can be pleased with any poetry. Their easy

grace, flowing from so inexperienced a pen, which yet never transgresses the strict laws of that measure, sufficiently refutes the idle assertion, that legitimate sonnets suit not the genius of our language.

If that assertion is grounded upon the French and Italian having a much greater variety than ours of similar terminations, that reason militates against using rhymes at all; while Johnson, you know, fancied that blank verse did not become the English muse. It is my opinion that she has the power of looking graceful in every possible dress, and almost equally so in all.

Accustomed to contemplate the lovely images of poetry, I am afraid Lister will be soon weary with the perpetual sight of our sovereign liege's phiz in a pair of scales. He may hereafter, too, probably, reproach the muse somewhat in Cowley's manner, when he says to her,

> "To all the ports of honour, and of gain,
> I often steer my course in vain,
> Thy gale comes cross, and drives me back again;
> Thou slackenest all my nerves of industry,
> By making them so oft to be
> The tinkling strings of thy loose minstrelsy."

That ingenious Being, whom the muses condescended to visit in a saw-pit, the sometime car-

penter, now joint-master of a cotton-mill, passed a week here lately; the mornings of which we devoted to poetic studies, and the evenings to the sublime music of Handel, through the energetic tones of Giovanni, and the melting notes of his daughter.

The mechanical genius and industry of this bard of the Peak mountain, have procured him more of life's solid good than he was likely to have obtained from the nymphs who gilded his day-dreams.

He lately wrote the inclosed verses (printed in the Sheffield newspapers) to promote the interest of a brother genius, now stricken in years, and whose ardent pursuit of the sciences cost him his eye-sight. An intention so benevolent, adorned with so pleasing an effluence of Aonian inspiration, will, I dare believe, make them acceptable to you.

As to Giovanni taking a pupil: he is often called away from Lichfield to distant concerts;—his vicarial stewardship takes up so much of his time when he is here; and in its recesses, he is so absorbed by his attention to Flora, that his own Elizabeth has not half the number of lessons she ought to have.

I can recommend Giovanni as a friend, as a critic in fine writing—as a sublime performer in

his own profession; as a botanist, a florist, and a mechanic;—but not as a master—since, though few are better qualified to teach, yet an impatience of temper makes that employment so irksome, that things, not half so material as the daily lesson, seem to him sufficient reasons for postponing it from day to day; often through elapsing weeks —he and his daughter desire to join my poor dear old father, and myself, in affectionate respects.

It rejoices me that you are able to range through the sweetest bowers in the world, and to ascend and descend your airy hill, with the strength and readiness of former years. The Muses are, I hope and trust, companions of your way; and that, ere long, the poetic world will be yet further enriched by the glowing fruits of those blest perambulations—Adieu! I inclose this letter to our benevolent friend, whom I do not love the less for receiving letters from Eartham in such envied frequency. Your's, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

MRS KNOWLES.

Lichfield, April 20, 1788.

THE date of your last letter, dear Mrs Knowles, sufficiently proves me the busiest of all creatures, of whose business there are no ostensible proofs. And now behold me about to commence the payment of my long debt, by a renewal of former chiding. I entreat you not to expect that mock modesty can ever pass muster with me from your pen.

You have perhaps forgotten that you reproached me in your letter, now before me, with partiality in classing you and Mrs —— in the same scale of wit and intellect. Her letters are lively, brilliant; yet, either my taste has no accuracy, or she is the complimented in that classification. In languages she is more learned, I grant—but I, who from long observation imagine myself justified in believing that the English is sufficient to cultivate the understanding, as high as it is possible to be cultivated, think not much of that ad-

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vantage. Is not our own language a master-key to all sciences and arts?—and was not one of the greatest, if not the very greatest genius the world has produced, unlearned, according to the common, but corrupted sense of the word? Mrs —— has perhaps as much wit as anybody;—but she has not so much efflorescence of fancy, eloquence, clearness and depth in the reasoning powers, as M. Knowles. Maria, thou knowest this—and hast never, in thy secret heart, felt Mrs ——, accomplished as she is, thy superior in the order of ingenious being. Therefore is it that I am half as much vexed at the fibs of thy humility, as I should be at those fabricated by the envy of others, in degradation of thy talents.

And now, what say you to the last publication of your other sister-wit, Mrs Piozzi? It is well that she has had the good nature to extract almost all the corrosive particles from the old growler's letters.

By means of her benevolent chemistry, these effusions of that expansive, but gloomy spirit, taste more oily and sweet than one could have imagined possible. To my taste, however, that sweetness is mawkishly luscious. A general vapidness pervades his coaxing, which proves how little it was the natural language of an heart,

which seems, at its very creation, to have been steeped in surliness.

But love is the great softener of savage dispositions. Johnson had always a metaphysic passion for one princess or other—first, the rustic Lucy Porter, before he married her nauseous mother;—next, the handsome, but haughty Molly Aston;—next, the sublimated, methodistic Hill Boothby, who read her bible in Hebrew;—and, lastly, the more charming Mrs Thrale, with the beauty of the first, the learning of the second, and with more wit than a bushel of such sinners and such saints.

It is ridiculously diverting to see the old elephant forsaking his nature before these princesses;

> "To make them mirth use all his might, and wreath
> His mighty form disporting."

This last and long-enduring passion for Mrs Thrale was, however, composed equally perhaps of cupboard-love, Platonic love, and vanity tickled and gratified from morn to night by incessant homage. The two first ingredients are certainly oddly heterogeneous; but Johnson, in religion and politics, in love and in hatred, in truth and falsehood, was composed of such opposite

and contradictory materials, as never before met in the human mind. This is the reason why folk are never weary of talking, reading, and writing about a man

> " So various, that he seem'd to be
> Not one, but all mankind's epitome."

Who yearned after a Scotish king, yet detested the Scotish nation; who worshipped the monarchial claims and despised the parental ones; who, hating dissenters of all denominations, held up the writings of Clarke and the life of Watts as models of perfection; who has declared, in his Rasselas, that to write poetry well is the consummate perfection of human intellect; yet speaks, in his Lives of the Poets, with contempt of almost every individual who has excelled in that art; who rejected, as infamous, the most prudent and necessary evasions in matters of fact; yet scrupled not to deny things he knew to be true, if they made for the honour of others; who gave his goods to feed the poor, yet burnt towards reputation in the lust of hatred; and, finally, who worshipped God as Indians worship the devil.

I dare say you think with me, that the princess's letters are very superior to those of her preceptor, except the letters from Scotland; where, getting

off his knees, he walks tall, and is himself, often his *best* self. He is himself also, his *worst* detestable self, in the instance of his envy recorded in the supplementary observations at the close of the correspondence—when he opposed D. Garrick's admission into the literary club, threatened to black-ball him, and, in an infamously reflecting couplet, classes his old friend, the companion of his youth, his fellow-voyager in the untried depths of fortune-making;—a man, so generally respected, originally so much his superior in birth and station, ranks him with gamesters and pimps!!!—while, with hypocritic cant, he seeks to veil this rancour, by professing personal esteem for his little Davy, as he called him. Then, what right had a man, who wrote a play for the stage, to avow contempt for the theatric profession?

You have marked his kindness to his native city, in the intellectual night with which he has overwhelmed her:

> "Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
> And universal darkness covers all."

I feel myself indebted to Mrs Piozzi for escaping a more peculiar destiny than that of being enveloped in the general fog. Chafing him, as I used to do, like a hunted boar at bay, with my

praises of other writers, I always knew he hated me in spite of his coaxing epithets.

Not understand Mrs Cobb's compliment in comparing you to a bank-bill! Fy! what a buzzard does this same mock-modesty make of our celebrated M. Knowles; or rather what a jesuit, winking and catching, with infinite adroitness, at false interpretation. In calling Mrs Knowles a bank-bill, is it not saying that everybody is ready to accept her?

Observing that you see me, in your mind's eye, surrounded with the luxury of ingenious society, surely you forget where it is my fate to reside—how few there are here, except Giovanni, who seem awakened to mental intelligence, unless it passes through the lips of celebrated strangers; for if an uncelebrated Shakespeare were to descend amongst us, the generality of them would not know him from a Quarles or a Bunyan; while even, from the most celebrated, were they to live here, our ladies and gentlemen would soon turn away their strained and aching eyes.

Giovanni has of late years been so absorbed in his attention to Flora, not the Flora Anglica, but the Flora Mundi, that, except at dinner, he is no more to be seen within these walls during daylight hours, than a certain bird, who has not the honour of resembling him much in any other parti-

cular, could be met with on an open plain smote by the summer's sun.

Ingenious strangers, however, are frequently introducing themselves, as they pass our thoroughfare city. Last summer gave me the pleasure of your friend, the young philosopher's company, an whole evening. I mean Mr Christie. I did not then know that he had the honour of your acquaintance; but I learned it from a very charming letter since received from him. The manner of his mentioning this acquisition, is pretty good acquittal for me of partiality in classing you intellectually with the Aspasia of our late overgrown Pericles.

What you tell me of ——'s apparently different opinion of magnetism in town, from that which he professed here, surprises me not.

While totally stupid and uninformed people, blind to reason, and callous to demonstration, refuse to recede an inch from opinions which they have once maintained, the half-ingenious, ambitious of ranking in the scientific class, and secretly conscious of standing on quick-sands, cling to every one's elbow whom they know to be on *terra-firma*.

Christie's mind is stronger and better furnished at nineteen, than R—'s could be were he to pass a Methusalem length of existence in talking and

writing about the powers and properties of nature, and the discoveries of science.

So the brilliant Sophia is commenced Babylonian. You and she will, I hope, often meet, now that you are in each others sphere of attraction. There is powerful magnetism on both sides.

I am glad to hear your George is well, and has scientific ambition; it is the best terrene aspiration in the mind of a wealthy youth.

Oratory is sporting nice fire-works in Westminster-hall; heating her furnace of philippics pure hot—but Hastings will walk through it safe as old Shadrach, and his cousins of the Meshech and Abednego family, Clive, Sykes, and Rumbold.

Those at the helm, that, from time to time, invest frail mortals with the power of wading to gold and gems through human blood, take care against the hour of their being called over the coals, to provide them with a jerkin of the asbestos material. Adieu. Your's faithfully.

LETTER XIX.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 25, 1788.

LOOK at the date of the inclosed letter. It will shew you, that no friend of later years has a right to reproach my silence, since that letter replies to one which I received from Mrs Knowles, last Christmas-day, with whom I have maintained the most intimate connection from my earliest youth. No shade of chagrin ever passed over our amity; yet are we each of high and independent spirit, and by no means see every object of genius, literature, and conduct, in the same light. But then, we hold our minds open to conviction; and neither of us fancy that greater and wiser people than ourselves must necessarily have violated that greatness and that wisdom, whenever they acted, or spoke, or wrote contrary to *our* ideas of "the first good, first perfect, and first fair."

When Catiline said, that to like the same things constituted friendship, he could not mean that perfect coincidence which never really ex-

isted between two human beings; and which if, through pusillanimous affectation, it appears to exist, must give to the social intercourse, whether by the fire-side, or on paper, the tediousness of solitude. Meaning no more, by his observation, than a general congeniality of tastes and sentiments, I am inclined to be of his opinion, presupposing that there is honesty of heart on both sides; without which, the characters of friendship are written in sand, amidst every possible congeniality of pursuits.

If certain flattering declarations in your last had any ground of probability, and chance and inclination had inmeshed you and me in the inextricable net, we must have been better humoured than dear *Old Sublimity and wife, in the days of Cromwell and Charles, if we had not soon scrambled as far asunder as that same net would permit; for, it must be confessed, we do see a few things in strangely differing lights. Politics, however, could not have been a source of dispute, if, indeed, you are a staunch whig, for I love not toryism of any species. Pray, recollect, friend of mine, who art so given to use the word *insist*, that toryism may pervade verbal opinions as well as political ones; and that all our con-

tests have been not with *my* opinion against *yours;* but, inferred from their practice, the opinion of *many* ingenious against that of *one* ingenious person.

Your friend's letter is very animated. I love every species of enthusiasm; but a noble mind loses ground with me a little, when I see it employ its energies upon the arts, while they slumber fastidiously over the higher exertions of intellect.

This observation refers to the glow over the statue of Apollo, in a former letter of his; a glow which I have never seen from his pen over any poet of any age or country. Painting and statuary are imitations—poetry is creation; and when she "gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name," and that in her happiest manner, there must be some defect in the understanding, if it pays not its first and most ardent devotion at her shrine. However, I wish success to this gentleman's benevolent exertions, and fair befal your eloquence to speed it!

If I had leisure for the muses, which I have not,—if I had spirits, which I have not, to encounter the solicitudes of publication;—and if I thought, which I do not, that poetry could have any influence upon our senators to induce them to espouse the cause of liberty and mercy, in behalf

of the negroes, I would demand if Africa has no benevolent genius?—if her nymphs and her river-gods are all besmeared with blood! I would make the Naiads of Niger and Gambia complain of the human gore which pollutes their waves. I would try if I could not rummage out some black muses, some sooty graces, to sit upon the topmost stone of an high African mountain, listening to the groans of a thousand nations. I would make an execration from a sable river-god to a ship loaded with slaves, crammed together in its hold, whose groans and cries should, at intervals, like the sound of the death-bell in Mason's beautiful Elegy on Lady Coventry, interrupt the execration, or be a kind of returning chorus to it.

That execration should be something like the Roman augur's to the legions of Crassus. I would call upon the Genius of England to remember what lustre the improved humanity of building hospitals, &c. has cast around his civic crown, and conjure him, by casting away the galling, and hitherto indissoluble chain, from the naked savage, toiling for him beneath torrid suns, to open a prospect of golden days to come,

"Where the swart negroes, 'mid their palmy groves,
Might quaff the citron juice, and woo their sable loves."

Were I to write a poem on this popular subject, it would be on somewhat of the above plan; but the want of time, spirits, and faith, are in the opposite scale, and my sooty muses and graces kick the beam. How should the solemn mourners march through the gates of my versifying region, since neither leisure, vivacity, or hope, are at hand to open them?

Adieu!—May you never experience the absence of those gentlewomen-ushers to wit-making, verse-making, or love-making!

LETTER XX.

Mrs Stokes.

Lichfield, April 30, 1788.

I TRUST we shall not be less sincere friends for the inevitable seldomness of our epistolary intercourse; that, if we complain, it will be of the complication of our employments; and if we reproach, that we shall reproach only the shortness of the day.

Much am I gratified by the wish you express

that we may sometimes meet, as we journey down the vale of life. Such meetings must be ever delightful to me. My wanderings through the pleasant paths which led to my friends, have, through life, as you know, been much restrained by the filial bands; and now those bands are become stronger than ever, by his weakness to whom they bind me.

The circumstance of your having once conversed with Mr Butt, beneath this roof, had indeed escaped me; but my conviction was perfect that you would all four be delightful acquisitions to each other. I might travel far ere I should find so interesting a parté quarré.

Miss ——— has lately favoured me with long and very amusing letters. She is a good deal in public, and much in literary parties, to which she has been introduced by her former acquaintance with Mrs Piozzi, Mrs Siddons, and the Great-heads, and by my efforts to draw her and Miss Williams together. Though her reading has not been very deep, or very general, and though I do not think she discriminates accurately in works of genius, yet her vivacity, her wit, and the graceful flow of an eloquence so natural to her, will enable her to support her part in such conversations with considerable eclat; unless, finding her own taste pall, as I have often seen it do, for li-

terary conversation, she should, after a while, lose part of her desire to please, and with it a yet greater degree of the power of pleasing.

I tremble for the temptations to elegant dress and expensive amusements, which must assail her on every hand. God forgive the sin, if a sin it is, of wishing cross and stupid Madam V—— in a world, where she must acquire, or soon be expelled, better sense and better temper. I do believe the thus emancipated would put on the brilliant fetters of our friend, though I could not engage that they would not pinch him now and then, as did the old ones; however, if a man must be galled, the smart is less painful, and the wound sooner heals, that is given by polished steel than by rusty iron.

I was happy to hear news from Mrs R——, of the health and welfare of you and yours, more recent than that which came to me in your last letter; but I had hoped from Mr Butt ere now, in his purposed visit to Lichfield, accounts of them more circumstantial. But yet he comes not,— Why tarry his chariot wheels? Not yet rolling towards us; but soon I hope to roll. Cannot you and the Doctor follow their track closely?— Would not the little suppers of such a party in our dining-room be animated, where you and I have so often supt pleasantly?

The mildness of last winter has, I imagine, been favourable to the extent of my poor father's life, that sits wavering upon his weak frame,

> " Like the light down upon the thistle's beard,
> Which every breeze may part."

Yet, how many people, in whose veins the tide of health ran with strong and flattering current, have sunk beneath its stagnation, since they, even they, bid me not flatter myself on the subject of his life.

When you present my affectionate regards to Dr Stokes, present them also to Mr and Mrs Butt; nor neglect observing to the latter, that I would write to him, but for the hope of conversing with him orally, perhaps even before this letter arrives at Kidderminster—by the way, that is a noble *bull;* but let it pass, since it passes quietly, and does not roar. But the sight of its very tail is enough to sicken one of employing a pen, which seems at present disposed to make bulls as readily as Neptune's trident made horses. Adieu!

LETTER XXI.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 10, 1788.

YOU have made my poor old father very happy, by kindly exerting yourself with our beloved Romney, to procure us the possession of that highly valuable present, which the paternal eye longs to behold, ere its light grows too dim to discern the excellence of art.

Earlier had I acknowledged the receipt of your kind letter, but, within this past fortnight, I have been so unwell with a violent cough, and inflammation upon my lungs, that all the time in which I was able to write, has been given to letters on indispensable business, and to the composition of a sermon, requested by an ingenious young clergyman of our neighbourhood, who has just taken orders, and who wishes to make his first essay in the pulpit with something of my writing.

If I know any thing of my talents, sermonizing is their *fort*. I have written several, and I think nothing of mine so good of its kind. Wherever I meet with oratorical prose, from the pen of

genius, it is not less dear to me than poetry. My imagination, though perhaps it cannot justly boast that splendid origin, loves to find itself at liberty to pursue serious, pathetic, and elevated subjects, free from the shackles of rhyme and measure.

The young bards were very happy in reading your indulgent mention of their writings. Never did more fervently admiring votaries bow before your shrine.

A female friend of mine, Miss Scott, has just published a poem, entitled The Messiah. She has considerable talents, and her numbers are easy and sweet. We have been friends and correspondents more than ten years; though, from the remoteness of our respective homes, we have been only once in each other's company, and that but for a single day. She is an excellent woman. Her filial piety has been exemplary. The 9th of this month was to be her wedding-day. The bridegroom has waited for her, with Jacobean constancy, nearly twice seven years; for she would not marry while her aged mother lived, whose wretched health demanded her watchful and unremitting cares. Last winter, sorrow and liberty came to her at once from the grave of a beloved parent.

Miss Scott has a serious and religious mind;

but her faith is Arianism. So also is his, to whom, I conclude, she has by this time given her hand; and whose proselyte I believe she is, for her father was a Clergyman of the Church of England.

On her lover's way through Lichfield, once in two years, I have had frequent opportunities of conversing with him. He defends his opinions ably. They are those of the late Dr John Jebb, whose abilities were unquestionable; whose manners, as an husband, a friend, and companion, were angelically amiable; and whose sincerity in his religious opinions,

> "His downright violence, and storm of fortunes,
> Did trumpet to the world."

Miss Scott sent me extracts from her Messiah some time since. I insinuated my apprehension, that the subject was not the happiest for poetry, when drawn out into historic precision; and that a poem of Pope's, bearing that title, and already in possession of the general admiration, would make against the reception of her's. I thought it a duty of friendship, my opinion asked, to give it freely.

However, many of her literary friends, who had fair hopes and confidence in the place of my

doubts, have persuaded her to publish it. The poetic critic in the Monthly Review is her personal friend, a circumstance much in favour of her poem. For, strange as it is, every thing upon which those gentlefolks, the public critics, frown, "weak masters though they be," sinks into a temporary oblivion, though glowing with the purest fires of the muses; sure, indeed, hereafter to emerge to the disgrace of their judgments, and to prove them of the never-to-be-extinct race of Zoilus.

By the way, I am assured, that a certain female author, of the mediocrè order, has, in the Critical Review, the post of censor-general of all the works of fancy, both in prose and verse. Indeed, the coldness with which Mrs Brooke's charming writings are mentioned in that work, smells strong of rivalry. When moderately ingenious scribblers sit in judgment upon the works of their superiors, it requires great integrity of heart to do justice to talents that have eclipsed their own in the particular sphere in which they wished to shine.

Unsustained by that integrity, you generally find them bestowing much warmer praise upon moderate than upon sublime compositions.

The note in Miss Scott's poem observes, that she caught the idea of her late work from a pas-

sage in your Essay on Epic Poetry. See how we little satellites move around you, our Jupiter!

Adieu!—Yours, &c.

LETTER XXII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 16, 1788.

YOUR pardon for having detained Mr L——'s letter so long. The desire of not returning it in absolute silence, was the reason of this delay. Illness co-operated with indispensables to prolong it.

The destroying angel has, of late, been busy within the gates of our little city—changing the countenance of our neighbours and our friends, and hiding our acquaintance out of our sight.

There was a startling degree of pathos in the selection of one of his victims. A fair, and amiable young lady, only sixteen, stricken in the glow of her health, and in the blossom of her beauty—the idol of a fond mother's heart. 'On Thursday three weeks she was walking upon our public

walk—her eye shining with health and sprightliness. That day week she lay a lifeless corse.

I had an inclination to see the body—and never saw I death so divested of its horrors. The still serenity of the features made their symmetry more conspicuous, and there was a perceivable smile upon the lips. A luxuriant quantity of dark hair, which had been pinned up in papers during her illness, was gracefully disposed in ringlets, that shaded her fair forehead, and fell half way down her arms, over her alabaster neck and shoulders. The most ornamented robe of fashion could not have been half so advantageous to her fine form, in all its vital bloom, as was the simple elegance of the shroud when it became a statue—a statue, whose whiteness and grace seemed to vie with the Medicean marble.

An ingenious young clergyman here, was to preach the Sunday seven-night after this pathetic funeral. He solicited me to make his sermon, and that it might be allusive to that mournful circumstance;—but it was Whit-sunday. Uncommon as was the effort to give a funeral oration on a festival, I thought it possible to blend the subjects, so that they might be favourable to each other; observing in the course of the sermon—that it could not be improper to view the bles-

sing of that day's commemoration through an awful perspective, even through the valley and shadow of death, whose thorny paths it can smooth, whose darkness it can illuminate; that we were called upon to rejoice in it for the dead as for the living, since the grave is not for the soul, and since for all that gives the capacity of happiness, in a purer existence, we are indebted to the influence of the Holy Spirit. I chose the text from the 7th chapter of Job;—a verse than which I think there is nothing in Scripture more sublime. "The eyes of them that have seen me, shall see me no more—thine eyes are upon me—and I am not."

The young preacher spoke this oration with solemn earnestness, and unaffected sensibility.

While I employed myself in this mournful task, I sickened of the same disease which had been fatal to her whose memory I was endeavouring to consecrate—a violent cough, and inflammation upon my lungs. Mine, however, was in a much milder degree—and, being a frequent complaint with me, I am not alarmed.

So Mr —— seems to think you ran a risk of disgusting the minister, by the warm glow of your praise—but if, where sincerity is not doubted, the ardour of deserved commendation does not cheer the spirit, and is not welcome to it, there

must be a comfortless intrenchment of ice about the heart.

I seem to feel some of those cold gales blowing about the integrity and the abilities which sustain and adorn your friend's sentiments and language—but it surprises me that an Englishman, writing to an Englishman, should disgrace his own rich language with the frippery of French phrases.

Mr.—— is a very perfect character, and one is inclined to worship the full of days. Adieu.

LETTER XXIII.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 1, 1788.

INDEED, dear Mr Hayley, my heart bleeds for the intelligence your letter brings—mournful, bitter disappointment!—I, who on this occasion grieve infinitely for you, grieve not inconsiderably for myself. I had taken the most lively interest in the destiny of that gallant, accomplished, grateful young man, whom you had so generously adopted, and so admirably instructed. I had

nourished the hope of one day being honoured and happy in his friendship, through your kind interposition.

Almost two years since he committed so precious a freight to " that fatal, that perfidious bark !"—Were you not alarmed by so long a silence ?—You probably formed some method of accounting for it, that preserved you from the rack of terrified suspense;—more agonizing than even that certainty, which, alas! must have been yours from the instant you knew how long it is since he sailed for England. Giovanni is not less shocked than myself—O ! my dear Mr H. that I could have been with you at Eartham, to have softened your griefs, by sharing them !—the only possible consolation in so deep a sorrow.

I once tasted this bitter cup of apprehension, which you are drinking to the dregs. In the winter 1770, I passed three miserable days and nights in well-founded alarm, for my sweet Honora's safety, then on a journey home through perilous floods—O ! that your present sorrows could be rewarded with rapture, such as succeeded to mine, when I heard the dear creature's voice in the hall !

I have often said that the delights of that evening, recompensed all the many woes of my life—but forgive the vain, the tantalizing wish !—I am

afraid there can be no possibility—you have great, great trials, my dear Mr Hayley—God Almighty support you under them, and prevent their utterly destroying your precious health!—The sweet boy—he would be a comfort to you. May you find in his talents, his affection, his virtues, and his prosperity, that happiness denied you from so many sources whence you had a right to expect it.

What a similarity in your fate to Milton's—the visual powers pained and impeded, though, thank God, not quenched;—and now you mourn a Lycidas, sunk beneath the waters!

I scarce know how to quit this mournful subject, even to express our gratitude for your having persuaded Romney to gratify my father, by his possessing, ere he dies, the promised treasure. It arrived late last night; rich, adorned, and invaluable, by the Romneyan powers. My poor invalid was fast asleep in his bed—Lister and Cary, our young bards, were supping with me. They were on fire with curiosity, while the nails were drawing, and highly gratified with contemplating the most masterly portrait their young eyes had ever beheld. I placed it by my father's bed-side at seven this morn.—He wept with joy when I undrew the curtain—wanted to kiss it, and has talked and looked at it all day. I send

some verses to Romney, by this post, which but ill express my gratitude.

This welcome guest made happy faces at our dinner-board to-day—but in the evening came your letter, and all now is gloom.

If you can learn any particulars of this grievous event, I am sure you will communicate them to me. Except yourself, scarce even those who knew the dear Howel, personally, could be more interested in the sad subject, than Your's, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

Dr Warner.

Lichfield, June 3, 1788.

I am more grieved than I can express for Mr Hayley. His love of the gallant unfortunate, like that of Jonathan to David, passed the love of women. Dreadful, that he should thus lose the long expected reward of all his exertions, so truly paternal, for a friendless youth!—Now, as he was returning, crowned with fame, prosperity, and honour, to the arms of his protector. O

that direful ocean! how many intelligent and brave spirits has it quenched! It was the grave of an excellent friend and kinsman of mine, a naval officer, who perished with Sir Peter Parker.

The picture with which Romney has so nobly presented us, arrived late on Friday night. It makes my poor father very happy. I am flattered by its being thought like me by yesterday's callers!—ah! those callers, they run away with all my leisure; yet I cannot help being glad to see them come in, so strong is my native love of society—every body that looks benevolent, and says nothing ill-natured, interests me.

I have read the Regent—to be sure it is a strange composition; though I like the Shakespearian method of making the menials speak in prose. The first scene is natural, simple, pathetic. The author has conceived his characters strongly—but his metaphors and similies are an odd set of unresembling resemblances.

It appears to me, that Mr Greathead has considerable genius—is dashing—self-sufficient, and utterly without taste; but his play acts well, and, with all its faults, is worth a thousand of such vapid rants as Mrs Cowley's last tragedy, which, she tells us, in her preface, "throws itself, crowned with laurels, at her brother's feet."

I wish I could, with truth, say more to Sophia in praise of her friend's play, this same Regent. She will be dissatisfied with less than unallayed, and enthusiastic approbation. Adieu!

LETTER XXV.

THO. SWIFT, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 5, 1788.

IT was more than compliment when I said I should be glad to see you. There is much interest for my imagination in such an interview. I admire your poetic genius, and I love your candour, as much as I despise and hate the insensibility of the age to poetic excellence. It has no patrons amongst the splendid and the powerful. The race of Mæcenas is extinct. We find senatorial oratory their sole and universal passion. Absorbed in that pursuit, they can spare no hour of attention for the muses and their votaries. Never was there a period in which the nymphs of the Castalian fountain had a more numerous train; never were they more bounteous with their glow-

ing inspirations. If we have neither a Shakespeare or a Milton, it is because the fastidiousness of criticism will not permit those wild and daring efforts, which, fearless of bombast and obscurity, often enveloped by them, and always hazarding every thing, enabled our great masters to reach their now unapproachable elevations in the dramatic and epic line. Lyric poetry has risen higher in this than in any age.

Suffer me to observe, that you ought not to be discouraged by the apathy of the public taste. It is fatal to the profits of authorship; but "fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise;" and every poetic writer ought to remember, that the laurel never flourishes till it is planted upon the grave of genius;—that Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were not known to Pope till he was in middle life—so strangely had even they fallen into that temporary oblivion, whither it is perpetually the fate of poetry to fall; but, to whatever deserves that name, the hour of emerging will come:

> "So sinks the day-star in the ocean's bed,
> But yet, anon, repairs his drooping head;
> And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore
> Flames in the forehead of the morning sky."

Mere verses, it is true, sink like lead in the mighty

waters, never more to rise; but your Temple has no native alacrity in sinking.

Cary, literally but just fifteen, is a miracle. I never saw him, nor heard of him till after his Ode to General Elliot came out. My acquaintance with him is not of four months date. His school-fellow and friend, Lister, an inhabitant of this place, has poetic talents of nearly twin-excellence. There is only a month's difference in their age.—You suspect my having assisted Cary. Upon my honour, I never saw any thing of his that has been published before it was sent away to be printed. The strength and solidity of that boy's mind, his taste, his judgment, astonish *me*, if possible, even more than the vigour and grace of his fancy. He is a warm admirer of your Temple, and has written a sonnet to express his sense of its excellence. I hope, ere this time, he has sent it to you. I charged him to send it to the Gentleman's Magazine.

Except my translations of Horace, and some letters, signed Benvolio, in that publication, together with a few sonnets, epitaphs, ballads, &c. that crept into that and other public papers, I have printed nothing but the Elegy on Cook, which I gave to Dodsley, Monody on André, and the Louisa, printed by Jackson in this town, Monody on Lady Millar, printed by Robinson, and Ode to General Elliot. Some other poems

of mine, which obtained the wreath at B. Easton, may be found in the last volume of that collection. I hate ever to think of printers and booksellers—so little integrity have I found amongst them. If I was on terms with Jackson, I would gladly order him to send you the collection you wish, but I have resolved never more to have any thing to say, or give any order, either to him or Robinson.

A set of spirited and witty essays are just come out, entitled, Variety; their principal author is one of my friends. Numbers 25 and 26 are mine. Do not stare at my apparent vanity. Those numbers are not among the witty essays of this collection. Wit was never my talent.

Thank you for your ingenious prologue; but the passage on music is not perhaps all it should be. It confounds the distinctions between poetry and music. Of the latter the ancients knew nothing more than melody. The principles of harmonic combination, by which all the great independent effects of the science are produced, were utterly unknown to them. We hear much, it is true, of the powers that music possessed over the passions in Greece,—but, in reality, those powers were given by the poetry they conveyed, to which music was merely a pleasing vechicle. We all know that the Grecian bards, with Homer at the head of them, sung their own compositions to the

harp. It must have been a simple, little varied, and probably spontaneous melody, to which so long a poem as the Iliad could be adapted. Doubtless the varieties chiefly resulted from the alternately softened tones, and heightened energies of the voice, and by the changes of the countenance. When the ancients spoke of music, they meant it generally as another term for poetry. So much yet of this equivocal expression remains, that we talk even of the modern poets striking the lyre. By that expression you know we do not mean that they are musicians.

Since the harmonic principles were discovered, music has been a great independent science, capable of a sublime union with fine poetry, and greatest when thus united; but capable also of giving fascinating grace and awful grandeur to the plainest and most unpoetic language, provided it is not so coarse or absurd as to force ludicrous images upon the mind, which must ever counteract all its elevating effects.

It is, therefore, improper, when we speak upon music as a science, which obtained in Handel the *ne plus ultra* of its excellence, when we seek to do honour to him, and its other great, though to him subordinate masters, at once the rivals and the friends of our poets; it is, I say, improper to confound the two arts by beginning with examples

so far back as that period, in which it is impossible to separate them.

Handel is as absolute a monarch of the human passions as Shakespeare, and his everyway various excellencies bear the same comparison to the pretty, sweet, lazy, unvaried compositions of the Italian school, breathing no other passions than love and jealousy, as the plays of Shakespeare bear to those of Racine, Otway, Dryden, Rowe, Voltaire, and our modern tragedies on the French model. Poetry itself, though so much the elder science, for music has been a science only since the harmonic combinations were discovered, possesses not a more inherent empire over the passions than music, of which Handel is the mighty master; than whom

> "Nothing went before so great,
> And nothing greater can succeed."

When I speak of that empire, it must be remembered, that a certain mal-conformation of the auricular membrane as inevitably frustrates this effect, upon even the most susceptible heart and clearest intellect, as mediocrity of talents, and dulness of perception, frustrate the effects of poetry. Where the ear does not readily distin-

guish and recognize melodies, no sensibility of heart, no strength of imagination, will disclose the magic of the harmonic world. Milton knew music scientifically, and felt all its powers. To Sam Johnson, the sweetest airs and most superb harmonies were but unmeaning noise. I often regret that Milton and Handel were not contemporaries; that the former knew not the delight of hearing his own poetry heightened as Handel has heightened it. To produce the united effects resulting from the combination of perfect poetry with perfect music, it was necessary that Milton's strains should be set by Handel and sung by Saville. Of all our public singers, while many are masterly, many elegant, many astonishing, *he* only is sublime. A superiority given by his enthusiastic perception of poetic, as well as of harmonic, beauty. I should observe, that the Rev. Mr Benjamin Mence, once of St Paul's and the King's Chapel, was equally great in his expression of solemn music; but from the harmonic world that sun has long withdrawn its beams. From Mr Mence Mr Saville first caught his energies, or rather, by his example, obtained courage to express them. Mr Harrison has great correctness and delicacy, and some pathos; but he has no energy, and without energy Handel can have no justice from his performer.

Colonel Barry lately appeared amongst us, but instantly fleeted away. I was delighted to perceive that he had exchanged the languor of indisposition for the sprightliness of health. Adieu!

LETTER XXVI.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 11, 1788.

How hopeless is it for you and me to dispute about style, when you think Johnson's detestable, and I think it matchless in grace and beauty, as well as in strength! Suffer me, however, to call to your recollection, that, on the sole ground of his superior eloquence, he is considered, by nine parts out of ten in the learned world, as one of the first writers of his age. His dictionary is confessed an affair of memory; his criticisms are monsters of sophistry, prejudice, and envy; his poetry, charming as it is, has been excelled by several of his contemporaries; his learning by several; but his language, his best prose language, by none. If you like, upon paper, the no-style no-

thingness of polite conversation better, I cannot help it; but then let us never talk about diction. Adieu!

LETTER XXVII.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 17, 1788.

REGRET, and the anxious perplexities of business, have done you a great deal of mischief, dear Sir, and my inmost heart deplores an influence so injurious; but, as you tell me that neither your appetite or rest suffer materially, I flatter myself, that the idea of a dangerous decline is but a gloomy vision, which a little time shall disperse.

You will regain your spirits I trust; and then Miss Port must be a fortunate young woman, in the protection of such a friend and monitor.

Amidst a scantiness of leisure, which recent indisposition has still farther abridged, I have lately amused myself with building more than 200 rhymes, upon a gothic foundation, which it amazes me that Gray did not take, in addition to his Runic Odes; since, however inferior my superstruc-

ture to the similar ones of his, the basis appears to me far more sublime than even the descent of Odin; and it presents the finest possible moment to Mr Wright's fire-tipt pencil.

Talking of odes, are you not charmed with the last Birth-day? It appears to me far the noblest and the most interesting ever born to that hackneyed subject. The new one of Collins, so lately emerged from the oblivion into which it had fallen, also delights me. It is on the Highland superstitions, and is, I think, in his best manner.

I have just read, for the first time, the base, ungentlemanlike, unmanly abuse of Mrs Piozzi, by that Italian assasin, Barretti. The whole literary world should unite in publicly reprobating such venomed and foul-mouthed railing. It appears in a magazine, infamous for the admission of abusive strictures on the writings of eminent people.

Your niece, Louisa, is a sweet child. She begged to see your last letter, and returned it to me with eyes overflowing with tears,—the precious earnest of a feeling and grateful heart. May they be the last she sheds on your account during very many ensuing years!—I am always, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, June 19, 1788.

I THOUGHT you in earnest, and wrote in the first impulse of vexation over the idea of losing my manuscript.

The careless ease of your disappointing replies to my repeated demands for three papers, sent to you on the condition that they should be returned, made me ready enough to imagine you meant to serve me so again. If I injured you, forgive me!

There is not much wonder that you think me irritable. All my correspondents would be of your opinion on that subject, were they to treat my requests with the same gay indifference.

You tell me I am not so meek as I might afford to be, without prejudice to my, as you call them, genius and talents. It has been observed, that where the imagination glows, the temper is seldom placid. Certain it is, my indignations are apt to kindle, at every appearance of people presuming upon the superiority of their situation:

" I have a soul disdaining contumely,
A guiltless spirit, that provokes no wrong,
Nor, from a monarch, would endure it, offer'd."

On a review of my past life, I have oftener found reason to regret the placability than the warmth of my disposition.

Writing in an irritated moment, perhaps every thing I said had a tinge of the prevailing vexation more than I was myself aware of. Certain it is, that I did not mean to reject your criticisms petulantly; two or three of them I design to adopt, and told you so.

Perhaps, however, in my most tranquil mood, I should have expressed my ever-during wonder at your verbal antipathies, and which seem to me utterly unaccountable. If you recollect, you will find that I never objected to a word or mode of expression in your compositions, without assigning the reason of that objection. That ought always to be done, to render criticism of use; and where it is done, few are more open to conviction, more acknowledging, than myself; all my other literary friends will bear that testimony of me. But, having made the grace, harmony, and elegance of the English language my long and particular study, I am not likely to adopt objections blindly.

Adieu! Do not think me quite a fury, and do more than *think*, be *assured*, that I must have real and lasting cause of resentment, ere I cease to be your sincere friend and servant—A. S.

LETTER XXIX.

Mr Newton.

Lichfield, June 19, 1788.

Amidst the late and present terrible wreck of commercial credit, I shuddered to think of the dangers to which you might have been exposed. Though your last proves, alas! that my fears have not been wholly groundless, and paints the penury and distress of thousands, consequent upon this wide-spreading mischief; yet there is comfort in the hope you give me, that your establishment is not ruinously drawn into the vortex.

On the other hand, I am grieved to find that, to the inevitable anxieties of such a fearful crisis, domestic sorrow has been superadded. The month, elapsed since the date of that letter, I trust, brought better health into your family.

All you say upon the former mortality amongst your children, is wise and just. Heaven often proves as kind in the seeming blessings it takes from us, as in the real ones it bestows.

Mr S., and his amiable daughter united with me in anxiety for your safety, amid this world of insolvency. It is the great objection to commercial undertakings, that neither a man's honesty, industry, or even prudence, can preserve him from the perils to which they are liable.

Thank God, my father remains much as when you saw him last. During the too glowing weather, he went out, in his little coach, morning and evening. Till yesterday's rain, nothing was ever more arid than our fields. Scanty, I fear, will be the hay-harvest.

Mr Hayley is much pleased with your poem to G. Ayre, and with your presenting it to him. His last letter commissions me with acknowledgments to you. With it travelled a very elegant composition, in verse, of the classical and brilliant Mr G. H——'s. The Bard of Eartham, in commenting upon them both, speaks decidedly in favour of the poetic genius of your poem.

I have spoken to you of Mr Hayley's noble adoption of a friendless youth of genius, of the name of Howel; that he himself added geography, French, Italian, and fencing, to the consi-

derable classic learning the boy had brought from Westminster school; that he procured him a commission; that Howel had behaved gallantly in the East; that his letters to his illustrious benefactor, were patterns of eloquent gratitude, and ingenious observation. All these things you know. About five weeks since, Mr Hayley went up to London, glowing with affectionate expectation of embracing the hero, "with all his blushing honours thick upon him." Alas! instead of this expected happiness, the direful tidings met him, that Howel had perished in the shoreless waters!

The dear bard is returned back to Eartham, to shed the bitter tears of sorrow and disappointment.

Adieu! my friend—how often, alas, is anguish the portion of the elevated and the good!

LETTER XXX.

H. Cary, Esq.

Lichfield, July 1, 1788.

Heavens! my dear Cary, is it a poet, a young, an ingenuous, an ardent poet, that condemns Mason for speaking with contempt of the malignant calumniator of his friend's poetic fame!—As to the plea that it was ungenerous to speak of a deceased contemporary with disdain, it is wholly invalidated by the observation, that Gray was deceased when Johnson shed canker spots upon his laurels.

Every month that rolled on, after the publication of the Lives of the Poets, rendered me more and more impatient of Mason's forbearance. I reproached him for it in some stanzas, printed in the Gentleman's Magazine for October (as I think) 1785.

So far, therefore, from being impossible, as you rashly aver, to palliate Mason's avowed contempt of Johnson, in his Life of Whitehead, it will appear amply justified, not only in Mr Hayley's eyes and mine, but in those of every person

who is not a partial idolater of the greatest enemy the poetic science ever had, or ever can have; one, who has already, by his frontless sophistry, brought it into a degree of disgrace, fatal to the expectations of its rising votaries. They must be vain, indeed, who can hope to please a race of readers, that have been taught, by Johnson, to look down upon the Lycidas of Milton, the sportive warblings of Prior, and upon the Odes of Gray.

Little do poets understand their own interest, or that of their science, who deem it unworthy to speak with scorn of its proud defamer.

To me there appears no middle path to be adopted with any rationality, after having read the Lives of the Poets, but either we must perceive and despise the envy and injustice of their author, or believe that there is little or no English poetry worth reading.

I hope and trust, my dear Cary, that the time will come when witty sarcasm, and splendid periods will no longer have power to dazzle your judgment against the claims of your predecessors, and to make you fancy that none have a right to speak as freely of Johnson, as he spoke of others, who were even greater in point of genius than himself. O prejudice! how do I live to deplore

yet more and more, every day, thy baleful influence!

> " Give me the man that's not enslav'd by thee,
> And I will wear him in my heart's core."

I did, indeed, stare to hear you quote my opinions upon Lee's play, Alexander, uttered so many years back. Little did I think, when I gave them, that an eaglet's eye was upon my criticism. Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER XXXI.

REV. MR FITZTHOMAS, on his Vindication of GRAY from the envious Strictures of JOHNSON.

Lichfield, July 9, 1788.

SIR—PERMIT me to return you my most animated thanks, for the perusal of a pamphlet, ingenious, learned, eloquent, generous, and convincing. That I had not previously seen it, that its reputation had not reached me, affords melancholy proof that we live in an age, in which fine writing, however abundantly produced, passes

away without its fame, and that there is little literary appetite amongst the general race of readers, except for politics, and for literary or personal defamation. In the Gentleman's Magazine for October 1783, I addressed an anonymous copy of verses to Mason, reproaching him for want of duty to his departed friend, in not rescuing his fame

> "From the Philistine critic, who defies
> The chosen armies of the heavenly muse."

You have stretched the giant at your feet, who had certainly vowed to raise a pile to the snaky goddess, formed of laurels torn from the brows of the English poets. But, alas! that too prevalent desire in human nature, to see the illustrious degraded, gives to the Johnsonian criticisms the power which Antaeus received from touching his mother-earth.

Mr H. Seward represses my hopes to possess what I should esteem a gem of my cabinet, by telling me that this pamphlet, which ought to be engraved in golden letters, is out of print, and that this copy, which you have given me the happiness of perusing, is your only one. Will you have the goodness to permit my detaining it a little while longer, that I may read it to the few,

alas! too few in this place, or among my more distant visitors, who are ingenious enough, and sufficiently unprejudiced by the sophisms of the envious dogmatist, to feel its excellence. I will take the utmost care of it, and have already commissioned a literary friend to try if it is possible to procure it for me.

Mr Potter's Vindication of Gray's Odes had pleased me extremely, but your's is of prior publication; and I can truly say, it appears to me even more full and complete. You dispute with Johnson every inch of ground, and totally subdue wherever you assail. I am, Sir, yours, &c.

LETTER XXXII.

H. Cary, Esq.*

Lichfield, July 19, 1788.

I am extremely flattered, and anew delighted, my dear ingenious Cary, by the poetic tribute with which you have honoured my Horatian Odes. Except Anacreon, Horace is certainly the gayest

* Now the Rev. H. Cary, the ingenious translater of Dante, vicar of Kingsbury, near Tamworth. 1810.

and lightest of the lyric poets. You say he has not a Pindaric feather in his wing. To me he often appears to have flashes of sublimity, at least, along the course of his odes. They frequently shone upon me through the dim veil of a literal prose translation;—but it is my creed, that verse-literality draws off all the spirit of an author. It was the creed of Dryden and Pope—as is evident from their always infusing a portion of new and original matter into their translations.

I could not, at the time, quite accede to your objection to the expression, "jocund scorn," in a poem of mine. We as often see scorn gaily, as gloomily expressed. Dipping, since we parted, into my favourite Pleasures of the Imagination, by Akenside, I found the following line, which has an expression synonymous to that of mine, which you disliked,

"Where gay derision bends her hostile aim."

My favourite word "yellow," of more than Italian liquidness, except when it is spoiled by the vulgar pronunciation *y*allow, and which has such a picturesque glow on the imagination, is as frequent in Thomson, as you say the word "bowers" is in my writings. If "bowers" is a word of infinite convenience in rhyme, Milton, however, uses it, through

the Paradise Lost, not less lavishly, though blank verse calls not for it with the same pressing necessity. Adieu!

LETTER XXXIII.

MRS KNOWLES.

Lichfield, August 29, 1788.

ON my return home from my late excursion into Derbyshire, I found your kind letter, which dear George had brought, when he found its bowery mansion deserted of its mistress.

Soul-exalting music, and the glad welcome of several friends, unseen during some of the late years, recompensed the exertion and anxiety of a being, so stationary as your Anna, divided from her feeble parent, whose life, dear to her peace, hangs by a line slight and attenuated as the spider's thread.

Within a mile of my native village, I could not resist the temptation of ascending the rocks amongst which it winds.

Though I found several valued old acquaintance in its mansions, who seemed thrice glad to

see me, yet were the sensations of this visit pensive, even to pain. I went into the church, where the ashes of my two infant sisters repose. The vacant pulpit, from whence paternal eloquence had so often met my ear, stood before me, as the dim apparition of former happy years.

We went, a large party, from Hopton on Monday, to dine at Matlock. We filled the coach, a whisky, and a gig. I had an idea that we might possibly meet you there, with your Telemachus, and felt disappointed to find this pleasure only ideal. Your purposed re-trip to Lichfield, ere you quit the country, will, I trust, be realized. No more gadding for me at present, so you will be sure to find me at home.

Three letters waited my return, announcing the intended visits of three separate sets of friends—the Martins; Mr and Mrs Granville, with Mr Dewes, the learned, the interesting, and the good, and his fair and accomplished niece, Miss Port, educated by Mrs Delany, and whose first years of womanhood have been gilded, from day to day, by the smiles of majesty, and by its personal attentions;—also, Mr and Mrs Whalley, who will pass most of the month of September with me, and whom I have written to desire Sophia will meet. Already have I written to them separately, to settle these matters—I must now hastily

leave you, to write to a duke, who has sent us a present in the most obliging manner,—to plan the introduction of a young actress of genius to the Bath theatre, and to acknowledge the favour of an author of consequence, who has praised my poems in his Life of Cook, just published.

The pleasures, which, from your late kind visit, I reaped in plenteous harvest, come frequently back to my recollection, and will long continue to do so. Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER XXXIV.

H. Cary, Esq.

Lichfield, Sept. 2, 1788.

Mr Whalley, one of the dearest of my friends, with his worthy wife, are my guests, and will remain here till Monday next. I know not if you have read his sublimely descriptive poem, Mont Blanc. His spirit is as sweetly attuned to every thing benevolent, sympathetic, and generous, as his imagination to

"The great, the wonderful, the fair."

He finds in your sonnets all that excites delight from each of these sources. We are to read your Horatian Ode to Elliot this morn. Mr W. is impatient to see the author of these charming effusions, whom he already loves.

He shrunk, with the most awakened sense of pain, from the late well-meant, but ill-judged interference, with the energies and exertions of friendship and literature.

Alas! that a natural and bodily infirmity in his son, should have produced such an arrangement of circumstances, as to make a parent, who is himself a scholar, and a sweet-tempered man, give such a gothic instance of authority, that, upon the surface of it, wears an air of

"Hating learning worse than toad or asp;"

And that it should really have forced him to consider genius as a misfortune to his son.

How I wander from the chief purport of this hasty scribble; it is to desire that you will, if possible, ride over, and give Mr W. as much of your society as you can contrive to do.

He is equally impatient to see Lycid, whom I shall ask to dinner to-day—but I am afraid, that, fearful of the contact of poetic spirits, they will not let him come.

How my heart aches for that dear youth!

"Who would not sigh for Lycidas, who knows
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme."

Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER XXXV.

EDWARD TIGHE, ESQ.*

Lichfield, Sept. 23, 1788.

YOU ask me if I know such a word as *seductive.* It is used perpetually in conversation, and I feel a conciousness of having met it often in elegant writing. We do not find it in Johnson's Dictionary, but it ought to have been there. Since the word *seduction* is scarce less frequently used than *expression,* why should it not have been a similar participle. Johnson gives us *expressive* and *oppressive,* but neither *impressive* nor *suppressive,* though proceeding as obviously from their respective sources. While *expressive* is on his pages, *inexpressive* is not, which he should

* The well-known Mr Tighe of Ireland.

have inserted, since Milton makes such fine use of it in Lycidas.

Johnson's omissions (through carelessness I suppose) are infinite. If you were to find in a letter of mine, " I wrote to Mrs ——, expressing my sense of her kindness"—or " I have an oppressing pain in my stomach," you would hardly censure me for too great verbal license, yet you will look in vain for *oppressing* or *expressing* in Johnson.

Concerning the importation of Latin derivatives. All new words, that are at once forcible and harmonious, do surely enrich and adorn our language. It appears to me that we ought to receive them thankfully, from our recollection, that every word, not of English origin, now mature, and received into our dictionaries, and understood even by the misses, had its infancy; which, if national jealousy, and false pride had crushed, our language, at this hour, must have been little less harsh and hissing, than German or High Dutch. The more the English tongue incorporates with the Latin, the more sweet and sonorous becomes our rhythm, the more round and full the periods of our prose; the more easily is it acquired, and pronounced by foreigners; the more widely will our works of genius spread over the neighbouring nations, and, consequently, the higher will rise the reputation of English literature.

I have corresponded much, of late years, with a fastidious critic of your acquaintance, who has more wit and genius, than candour, judgment, or generous perception of contemporary excellence, in beautiful writing. With the tetchiness of a spoiled child, he kicks at every word that is either older or younger than the chit-chat of polite companies; and, when used by the moderns, he quarrels with all the witcheries of Shakespearean simplicity, and with the grandeur of the Miltonic phrases; together with the thrice-happy grammatic licences, that give grace and spirit to their writings.

Such forwardness is more oppressive to me than stupidity itself, and it has often made me so cross, that Hardinge thinks me ill-tempered.

Candid disquisition I have always thought delightful; and I am acknowledged to be patient of criticism, but then my reason must be convinced. I demand the *why* and *wherefore*, of objection; and, obtaining them, gratefully kiss the correcting hand—but save me, ye Powers of sensibility and justice, from literary correspondents, who hate *for they do*.

There is no end of producing what they call feeling, as a critical criterion. Mr Hardinge, perhaps, detests a particular mode of expression; Mr Hayley thinks it charming—yet Mr Hardinge

says, there is no reasoning upon these matters, they must be referred to feeling—let it be so, respecting his own likings and dislikings—but it is arrogance to expect, that I should deem *his* feelings the unerring judges of propriety, harmony, and grace.—Why may I not be allowed to have as much respect for my own?

But how I have forgotten your passion for conciseness, thus suffering myself to prate about it, and about it!

Adieu!—May health and happiness like to be near you, as well as I do, for at least forty years to come!

LETTER XXXVI.

H. Cary, Esq.

Lichfield, Sept. 25, 1788.

Your letter, my dear C—, has inspired a cheering hope for the fate of the gallant, interesting, and grateful Howel. I did not happen to see the paragraph in question. All, however, is silence from Eartham. Not a week did I delay to answer that mournful letter of Mr Hayley's,

announcing his fears on this subject. My answer expressed sincere and tender sympathy. It observed that, since he well knew the lively interest I had long taken in Howel's destiny, and must ever take in what so nearly concerns his own peace, I could not doubt receiving an instant line of information upon the dawn of any hope in that now dark quarter. If indeed they are now happy in a reunion, this silence is at once unkind and unfeeling, and will convince me that they did not slander the dear illustrious bard, who whispered to me that his affections were subject to ague fits. Sure I am, that I never deserved to lose one atom of that fervent friendship which Mr Hayley's letters, during the first years of our correspondence, pledged to me should be eternal. The letters with which he has honoured me, during the past three years, have had intervals of several months between their dates, are shorter and less affecionate than those which blest me in the years that are flown. Never will he find a being more devoted to his genius, more interested in his happiness, more attached to his virtues.

It is of Colonel Barry that I mean to inquire concerning the safety of Howel, since, if the person mentioned in the papers prove some other of that name, it would be tearing open the poor bard's wounds to ask the question of him.

Alas! my dear C—, the night before last my father had another dreadful seizure; and though the present danger seems past away, it has left him weaker than ever, both in body and mind. During yesterday, I could not find a moment in which to take up my pen; and my spirits were so oppressed, that if I had not wanted leisure, I should probably have wanted resolution.

Burns is honoured by your having adopted his word "chittering;" yet I know not if it is well to apply the epithet generally to so sweet a songster. Burns does not say the chittering red-breast; but he mentions the chittering wing of that little bird, when he sits forlorn on a leafless bough through a snowy night. *Unwaking*, for the sleep of death, is a fine epithet, which I believe you have created.

The new poet you mention, is said to be a distinguished classic scholar. If so, he adds strength to my long conviction, that though familiarity with the Greek and Latin poets may improve a fine genius, yet that it will never enable a moderate one to write elegantly in his own language. Adieu!

LETTER XXXVII.

H. Cary, Esq.

Lichfield, Oct. 4, 1788.

Send me a copy of your sonnet addressed to M. Swift, on his Temple of Folly. I want to show to one of my literary correspondents, who affects to despise that ingenious, though not faultless work, what are your sentiments of its merit:

> "Their praise is fame, that makes the poet live,
> Who knew themselves to win the palm they give."

Did I conceive that I should catch myself writing an epigram, who have so little *antithetical* point in the constitution of my fancy? There's a word for you, fresh from the mint. You must have discovered that I am a prodigious coiner.

Alas! your hope for Howel's safety was fallacious. Too certainly

> "He floats upon his watery bier."

LETTER XXXVIII.

REV. —— BERWICK.

Lichfield, Oct. 6, 1788

WITH more wit than justice, my dear Sir, does your last letter rally me upon one of the mortifying circumstances of my situation, that of being unable, through want of leisure, to cultivate frequent epistolary intercourse with my absent friends, and to form new connections of that sort with the ingenious and the amiable who honour me with their notice. Alas! when to such I am silent, it is never from indolence.

Too soon, however, does your letter grow serious, and complain of mournful devastations in the hoarded treasures of the heart. Mine has known what it is to grieve from that source of sorrow, and breathes sympathetic sighs for your loss. Three dear friends torn away in three short months!—it is a trial that bears hard upon the spirits. I hope the fourth, whom you hint as being worse than dead, has since been restored to the comforts of existence. I was glad that time

had so far healed the wounds of deprivation, that your health no longer suffered.

A more beautiful poetic image I never met than that presented in the lines you quoted on this melancholy occasion; Memory, sitting at the altar she has raised to Woe, and feeding the source of her own tears.

You inquire after my poetical sister, Mrs C. Smith. I never saw her, and know only the mere outline of her history as the wife of a profligate spendthrift, who lived near Mr Hayley in Sussex, and there dissipated his fortune. A fine woman in her person, and the mother of many children. Popular as have been her sonnets, they always appeared to me as a mere flow of melancholy and harmonious numbers, full of notorious plagiarisms, barren of original ideas and poetical imagery. You observe, that, till Mrs Smith's sonnets appeared, you had considered the sonnet as a light and trivial composition. Boileau says that "Apollo, tired with votaries who assumed the name of poet, on the slight pretence of tagging flimsy rhymes, invented the strict, the rigorous sonnet as a test of skill;"—but it was the legitimate sonnet which Boileau meant, not that facile form of verse which Mrs Smith has taken, three elegiac stanzas closing with a couplet. Petrarch's, and Milton's, and Warton's sonnets are

legitimate. Some of Milton's are hard and unpleasing, and one is evidently burlesque, and was certainly never intended by him for publication; but the best of them, that to the soldier to spare his dwelling-place; that on the Piedmont massacre, to Cyriac Skinner on his own blindness, and that sweet one to Laurence, are the patterns of excellence in the English sonnet. They have the plain majestic energy, characteristic of that species of poetry, and blend the undulating pause of blank verse with rhyme, and so prevent the ear from being cloyed with the quadruple recurrence of similar sounds. There is beauty also in the sonnet to the nightingale, and in that to his deceased wife, but they are less perfect than the former. That to Oliver Cromwell, as far as the word "war," is, amidst its energetic plainness, sublime in the first degree; but it concludes unhappily.

Of Mrs Smith's sonnets, I must observe, that I have only seen the first edition; in the preface to which she says, "If, in these sonnets, there are any lines taken from other poets, I am unconscious of the theft. The first of these sonnets concludes:

> "Ah! then how dear the muses' favours cost,
> If those paint sorrow best who feel it most."

Pope's concluding line in his Eloisa to Abelard, is:

" He best shall paint them who shall feel them most."

There is a pretty image in Mrs Smith's second sonnet, but it is taken from Collins:

" Till spring again shall call forth every bell,
And dress, with humid hands, her wreaths again."—*Mrs S.*

"
" Till spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow'd mould."—*Collins.*

That second sonnet concludes thus:

" Ah! why has happines no second spring?"

This conclusion is a very inferior imitation of Beattie's " Hermit's Complaint," of which the ensuing lines form the last verse:

" Nor yet for the ravage of winter I mourn,
Kind nature the embryo blossoms will save:
But when shall spring visit the mouldering urn;
O! when will she dawn on the night of the grave."

Mrs Smith asking the question of *happiness*, which Beattie asks of *the spring*, proves the mischiefs of injudicious imitation.

Your friend Mr —— tells me he suspects Mrs Piozzi gave Johnson's letters to the world that they might form a decent vechicle for the publication of her own. It appears to me, that the natural desire of letting the world know how highly she was esteemed by a person so distinguished, —how constantly, during so many years, she engaged his revering attention, was the master-spring of that publication. If she had chosen to have printed her own letters, I cannot think she needed any excuse—any vehicle for introducing them to the public. There is no greater vanity in publishing one's letters, than one's essays or poems. You say you like no letters but Swift's: Surely, my dear Sir, there is more than one beautiful style of letters. Swift's are pleasant in the humorous chit-chat way. Those, however, please me better

——————————"That steer,
From grave to gay, from lively to severe."

Why should not genius expand in private letters; describe scenery with the glow of the painter; characters with the fire of the dramatist; moralize with the dignity of the philosopher; and sometimes, under the pressure of sorrow, court "Fancy as the friend of woe?" Why, in short, should any charming efflorescence of the imagination be banished from the page which is

designed for the eye of friendship?—and why should our style be eloquent only when we are writing to the world?

I have bewildered you in the mazes of criticism. You will be glad to get out of them. So will you, for my sake, to hear that my poor dear father yet lives in tolerable ease, though the dart of death has been often shook over his feeble head since I wrote to you last.

Lady Moira honours me by the predilection which you flatter me she feels in my favour. Cherish it for me, I pray you.

Mrs Gastril continues to receive sacerdotal homage, as usual.

Adieu! May the length of this epistle expiate its long delay! Yet, if you happen to dislike critical investigation, the purposed atonement forms the greater sin.

Yours, very faithfully.

LETTER XXXIX.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 10, 1788.

I AM not inexorable, nor so arrogant, as to think lightly of any person's talents or virtues, be-

cause they may happen not to treat me with that respect, and attention to the communicated circumstances of my situation, which I have been accustomed to receive; but my leisure is incompetent to the various claims upon it, which seem to increase daily; and, if I resume my correspondence with Mr H., I must neglect those who have never treated me with disrespect.

I flatter myself that we have mutually our merits; but there is a certain uncongeniality in our ideas and opinions, which has betrayed, and always will, if we continue to correspond, betray us into saying things to each other which neither can like to hear.

Upon the cover of the most sarcastic letter ever penned, I have written, "to be read frequently, as a medicine against vanity."

When you hold out to my regard for you the bait of kind and gratifying avowals, I fly to this letter, for conviction how impossible it is that you can have any real esteem for talents, which you fancy disgraced by vulgarism, and for a disposition which you believe deformed by the most ungoverned violence of temper. How can you be so unjust to yourself, as to throw away a wish, a minute upon such a being?—and how can I help turning from you to those who think better of me?

It is, perhaps, right to make an exchange of our letters. I promise, upon my honour, to return yours the instant you send me mine; to return all except the medicinal one, which I must keep to be a check upon my rising pride, when flattery or partiality seeks to persuade me that I am ingenious and respectable.—Adieu!

LETTER XL.

Mr Newton.

Lichfield, Oct. 12, 1788.

The disease, which has so malignantly visited yourself and your poor wife, now oppresses me, but with less severity. Ill as I am, and sighing under the pressure of much writing, when all writing is prejudicial to me; yet my heart will not be restrained from assuring you of its sympathy, and of its hope, that health and peace are, by this time, re-established in your mansion.

Never was your imagination more lovely than in the letter before me, notwithstanding its mourning raiment. It places me by you upon the heath-bush, on the sunny-side of one of my native moun-

tains. The particular names, so familiar to my recollection, of the hills, the cliffs, the woods, and the valleys, which form that wide landscape, then stretched before you, brought it to my eye with many a thrill of affectionate pleasure:

> " He sang of Tay, of Forth, and Clyde,
> The hills and dales around;
> Of Leader Haughs, and Yarrow Side,
> O how I blest the sound!"

Some of my hours have passed pleasantly away since we parted, in the society of dear Mr and Mrs Whalley, who came to see me in September. The former, engaged in building, and in opening a little Edenic habitation, in a bloomy wilderness, could stay only a week; but the latter was my guest during three. She is a pleasing rational companion, infinitely estimable, though genius may not have infused her ideas, as those of her husband, in its etherial dyes.

My poor father has twice, within these seven weeks, been re-visited by his terrible convulsion fits, yet recovered from each of these attacks in a few days. On the 17th of this month, please God he lives to see it, his 80th year will be completed. Scarce less than a miracle his living to see it, so often as, in the course of the last eight,

the dart of death has been shook over his feeble frame.

My father being quite as well as usual while Mr and Mrs Whalley were with us, you will imagine, that it was a golden week. I introduced our young poets to him, Cary and Lister, of whom he thus writes, in a letter I received from him yesterday:—"Have you seen the reserved and pensive Cary, since I left you? He is a very extraordinary lad, strongly marked in manners, as well as mind, by the hand of genius. His total freedom from ostentation, and severe kind of simplicity, are uncommon features at any, and much more at his age, in a nation so immersed in luxury, vanity, vice, and varnished manners, as is England now. Dear lovely little Lister! I hope he will conquer that unfortunate impediment in his speech, and be enabled to pursue the shining path open to his fine abilities, and thirst of literary acquirements."

Indeed they are charming youths; yet is there one thing that I could wish otherwise in both of them,—an aptness to decide too arrogantly against general opinion, to take whimsical aversions to beautiful writers, and of established fame in their own science. They assert, that Pope had little natural genius, and that his splendid graces were

the creation of art alone. I wonder and exclaim at them both in vain. Such prejudices, in such minds, are, to me, the most unaccountable things in nature. They deify Dryden, who, with all the riches of his invention, and often beautiful numbers, is, in my opinion, thrown much below Pope, by his slovenly vulgarities, and wild absurdities.

There is a sonnet of unmatched beauty in the last Gentleman's Magazine, addressed to Cary and Lister. It has the same initials, J. W., with that sublime poem in my praise in the Gentleman's Magazine for October 1784. I have little doubt that Mr Hayley is the author of both.

I do not believe Lister ever sent you his charming sonnet addressed to yourself. Behold it :—

" Newton, whose soft and sweetly varied strain
Enchants the raptur'd sense, what power divine
Taught thee, dear bard, the blooming wreaths to twine,
Cull'd from fair poesy's luxuriant plain
With art so lovely!—Not the pensive swain
Musaeus, favo'rite of the tuneful nine,
Wak'd purer melody. Thou bright shalt shine
The boast, the wonder of the laurell'd train :
Thou, who wert born the arduous paths to explore
Of steep Parnassus ; from its mazy ways
Dauntless to pluck the golden-vested flower,
Chaste reputation; nor shall that fierce ray,
Shot from malignant Envy's glaring eye,
Or tarnish, or embrown its glowing dye."

LETTER XLI.

H. Repton, Esq.

Lichfield, Oct. 14, 1788.

I should suppose nobody has ever been so well qualified as yourself for the profession you purpose to assume, that of landscape gardener; I mean who has ever taken it up, skilled, as you have long been, in all its scientific branches, and possessing, as you do, the poet's feeling and the painter's eye.

Neither acquaintance nor connection have I with Mr Mason, the tuneful and accomplished master of the art you profess. I have, however, found a channel of conveyance to him, for one of those beautiful proofs of ability, to execute the task you undertake. My poetic friend, Mr Whalley, is intimate with a bosom friend of Mr Mason's, and that is my channel. Mr W. has also engaged to disperse three or four more of these landscapes amongst nabobs and purchasers of new situations, who may happen to fall in his way, and who may wish to see an Eden opening in their wilderness;

" Hills, that swell with gradual ease,
Wood-skirted lawns, and tufted trees,
With vallies, seen down distant glades,
That break the mass of mingling shades."

Mr W. will be at Bath this winter. He is very warm-hearted, and oratorically persuasive. I have interested him in your fame and success.

You have considerable connections amongst the people of rank. Once introduced, the wood-nymphs and the naiads will be your acknowledged handmaids.

I am not blind to the poetic faults of the Temple of Folly. It has many; but I find in it what appear to me indubitable marks of genius,—bold invention, picturesque imagery, strong satire, and sonorous versification. The acrimony against the harmonic science is certainly a little impertinent, at least in the manner. But we must forgive poetic genius, so neglected in this soul-less silly age—this age, that strikes medals in honour of talents, that can personate naturally a detestable indecent Hoyden! We must, I say, forgive poetic genius, if we find her stung by the consciousness how much more the musicians are patronized and admired than the bards—though she certainly ought not, therefore, to express contempt for a sister-art—younger, less important, but *still* a *sister*.

The notes are, it must be confessed, often superfluous and extravagant; but if they wander, it is into the regions of learning, from whence they bring back, to me at least, amusing information and ingenious disquisition, though frequently in too familiar, and sometimes in coarse language. I think all about Lunardi splendid, and judicious irony. The first discovery of the aerostatic powers seemed interesting and important; but when their uselessness was proved, by its being found impossible to navigate the machine, why pursue the expensive, the dangerous experiment? When life is thrown at the mercy of the viewless winds, to answer no better purpose than that of a raree-show, there cannot, I think, be a fitter object of poetic satire.

It was not well to lay out the Garden of Folly upon a totally exploded plan. Existing and non-existing absurdities should not be jumbled together. There is the same objection to the literary dunce being made to present Moria with a species of novel that nobody either writes or reads in the present day.

The patron goddess, on her regal couch; her dress, and the allegoric personages that form her court, strike me as ingenious in no common degree, though an ill-judged employment is allotted to Credulity. We find a coxcomb-parson admi-

rably hit off. " The new Adonis, fresh from Lebanon," the Birth-Day Carriage, drawn and coloured with classic elegance, and the modern fine lady who occupies it, are displayed in characteristic strength. I do not know a more spirited portrait in poetry than that of the Votary of Scandal, the Detestable Old Maid, on the pages 53 and 54,—nor, had the description of the female Jockey been Pope's, would it have disgraced him. But the poem is too long for me to pursue it farther through its maze of faults and beauties.

Adieu! Success attend you.

LETTER XLII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 19, 1788.

THIS struggle with my pride, and my resolution for the resumption of our epistolary commerce, is flattering, I grant you; but nothing is more astonishing to me than that you should think it worth your while to make it—for what, alas! can it give you? It is only once in many

weeks that I can write to any single friend; and what is this seldom-letter to contain? We have neither friends nor connections in common. You may, it is true, amuse me from a thousand sources; but I feel a cheerless consciousness of being unable to make you any return.

I have lately talked about you to a sweet unfortunate who knows you well—the widow of poor Mr Bicknel. Are you acquainted with the romantic circumstances of her early youth? She and her children are left without any provision. It is hard to be dependent upon the bounty of friends, especially after having married rather from discretion than from choice.

Mr Herbert Croft, who wrote the life of Young, in Johnson's Lives of the Poets, is fabricating a dictionary upon a much more extensive plan than Johnson's. He has requested my assistance, together with that of many others in the line of poetic quotations. Mr C. thinks it arrogance in Johnson to expect that the world should take his word for passages being in certain authors, without enabling the reader to consult the passage itself, by directions how and where it can be found. He means also to avoid the invidious contempt Johnson shewed of his contemporaries, by scarce ever quoting them. Respecting the poetic authorities, he means to go as far

back as he can among the elder poets, citing passages of illustration, and descending from them, through those of later times, to the bards of the present day. He desired me to put down any passages for this purpose that happened to present themselves to my recollection.

I have blotted a few sheets at his request; but the minute exactness required in the signals of reference, bore too hard upon the memory, intrenched me in a litter of volumes, and transformed my fingers into ten angry ferrets, from the situation of the passages I recollected often eluding my search. I grew so completely sick of the task, that never shall I attempt to resume it; while doing, no more, what I have done wasted many of my hours to just such a purpose, respecting his undertaking,

"As when a rain-drop seeks to augment the ocean."

I wish to send him these sheets, to shew that I had not been quite unmindful of his request. If you think them likely to afford you any amusement that may recompense the trouble of franking them to him for whom they are intended, I will send them open to you.

LETTER XLIII.

Miss Helen Williams.

Lichfield, Oct. 19, 1788.

At length, dear Miss W., it is given me to draw your last kind letter from my hoard of epistolary treasures, and to have the pleasure of replying to it.

I have read your glowing poem, in Dr Kippis's Life of Cook, and felt at once thrilled and warmed by its solemn fire. I long for a more intimate acquaintance with its excellence, than one perusal in a society volume enabled me to be. Dr Kippis has, I trust, received my acknowledgment of the favourable mention he has made of my poem, though I smile to see how curiously he guards against either you or me growing too vain on the subject of our poems on Cook,—deploring, as he does, that our hero had no *abler* panegyrists.

It is only for one eight days that I have ventured to leave my father, since I wrote to you last. A rich festival of oratorio music allured me to Sheffield. My road lay over the wild hills, and through the luxuriant vales of my native Der-

byshire. The pleasures I feel from the contemplation of romantic scenery, is there always heightened by the patriot passion. Within a very little way of the village that gave me birth, and of which my dear father is rector, I could not pass it unvisited. But, alas! having never been there before without him, I felt a dreary and painful void as I roved through the unfurnished apartments of the lonely rectory, and saw the rank grass of the bowling-green waving in at the parlour windows. I went into the church, and gazed on the vacant pulpit—ah! how that vacancy struck upon my heart!

I am glad you think so highly of my ingenious and graceful friend Miss ——. If she had loved reading works of real genius as well as you and I do, what might she not have made of her very fine talents! Nobody speaks, and few write, more eloquently; her great desideratum lies in the want of firm and responsible estimation of works of real genius. I have known her praise compositions of the heaviest mediocrity with enthusiasm, and cold and insensible to most admirable compositions.

I am glad you and Dr M. like my Johnsonian conversation. But Mrs K. is curiously dissatisfied with that tract, because it does not record a long theologic dispute, which succeeded to what I

did put down, and in which she ably defended the Quaker principles from the charge of deism and absurdity, which the Doctor brought against them. She fancies that she appears in a poor eclipsed light on this same manuscript, because she there opposes only strong, calm, and general reasoning to the sophistic wit of her antagonist.

I have looked with your eyes on Collins's new-found ode; and I doubt not that you have looked with mine on the sublime graces of the last Birth-day Ode. It casts all other birth-day odes into shade. What a delightful compendium does it present us of the history of this nation! I consider the poetic genius of the laureate as very great, —and that his poetic learning is unequalled.

Mrs Piozzi does me much honour in the style in which you tell me she speaks of your friend. She is herself a brilliant and accomplished being, whose praise is fame.

During the progress of this hasty letter, Mr Boswell sent up, from one of our inns, that he would breakfast with me to-morrow morning. He has so much wit, eloquence, and good humour, that it proves right pleasant to converse with him.

Mr S. is engrossed by attendance upon at least two thousand rare plants and flowers, so that his friends lose many hours every week of his com-

pany;—hours which they do not like to spare. But his fame as a botanic florist flies far. On the side of Johnson's favourite gigantic willow, and in the bosom of that pretty valley which slopes from the east end of our cathedral, lies his little garden. It is become one of the Lichfield lions which strangers go to see.

Not beginning this letter till past ten, I have borrowed from sleep to prolong it—yet it may be some days ere the packet sets out for town. I wish to write to Mr Gregory. The discriminating manner in which he speaks of my works, is a thousand times more gratifying than any general praise can be. I have received no more powerful stimulus to encounter again the trouble and anxiety of publication than his last letter extends in reviewing my ode to Eliot;—but the visits of distant-dwelling friends passing through this thorough-fare city—those of strangers who procure admissive letters, or messages—nursing;—filial stewardship, spiritual, as well as temporal, together with my overgrown correspondence, weigh heavy against the claims of the muses.

Remember me with the kindest thoughts of my heart to the dear Mathias's. I hope they and your mother and sisters are well, in whose obliging recollections I shall be happy to live. Adieu.

LETTER XLIV.

REV. DR GREGORY.

Lichfield, Oct. 30, 1788.

I CONSIDER it one of the highest honours ever conferred upon me, that you should have expunged from your valuable work, a note by Professor Michaelis, in consequence of my comments. It is exalted minds only that we find so condescending.

I feel impelled to meet you, once more, on the ground of Sterne's pretensions to literary fame. It appears to me, upon the most mature deliberation, that few, if any, of the ancient or modern writers have greater claims to originality.

Passing over the notorious imitations of the Latin poets, with Virgil at their head, of the Greek ones, recollect that Shakespeare borrowed almost all his plots, and the outlines of many of his characters from old novels—that Milton was indebted to the Scriptures for his story in the Paradise Lost, and to Homer, Dante, and Ariosto, for the chief features of his supernatural scenes.

Taking designs from others, was never reckoned plagiarism.

Mr Warton has proved, in his edition of Milton's lesser works, that the most considerable part of that fine imagery, and of those beautiful descriptions of natural objects in the Lycidas, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, and Comus, were taken from Brown, Drayton, and, above all, from Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess.

Dryden and Pope took as largely from their predecessors. Swift borrowed from Rabelais. Imitative traces, of one kind or other, may be found in all works of imagination, up to Homer; and that he is not detected in the same practice, is certainly owing to the little that remains of the writings of his predecessors.

When a great genius condescends to imitate a less, he always excels him; and then the authors, from whom he took, sink, eclipsed, into darkness, if not into total oblivion.

In equal degree that I think the above-named juvenile poems of Milton superior to those of Browne, Drayton, and even that of the sweet fanciful Fletcher, do I think the Tristram Shandy, in natural humour, in dramatic spirit, and in truth of character, superior to the Scribleriad Family, in Pope's Miscellanies.

It cannot be denied, that this joint work of

Pope, Swift, and Arbuthnot, suggested to Sterne the plan of Tristram Shandy;—but how has he drawn it out!—how glow his colours in the vivid tints of Nature!

Much wit, some humour, and a great deal of learning, may doubtless be found in the Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus;—but, after all, it is a strained caricature burlesque of antiquarianism. It deviates from its original plan, and soon becomes a mere vehicle for very spirited critical satire upon the fustian poets of that day. It is true, this critical satire is, in itself, very valuable, but all the characteristic traits of the hero are lost in its mazes, and the work ceases to be, in any degree, a memoir, or an history.

A child educated in absurdity, or false science, becomes a very able ironical critic—consciously, purposely ironical, or he would not call what he pretends to admire by its proper name—instance, "We cannot too earnestly recommend to our authors the study of the abuse of speech!"

Neither can we conceive that such a character as Cornelius Scriblerus ever existed, while Shandy's pedantries and systematic absurdities are natural living manners—he is of our acquaintance;—we sit at table with him. Every personage in his family, down to the fat scullion, lives—and they are, by those happy characteristic touches,

that mark the hand of genius, brought to our eye, as well as to our ear.

You observe that Toby Shandy is the Commodore Trunnion of Smollett. It is long since I read Peregrine Pickle, and it made so little impression, that I have no remembrance of the Commodore. It is impossible that I should ever, even after the slightest perusal, have forgotten the warm-hearted, honest, generous Toby Shandy, by whose absurdities, so happily mingling with his kindness, and with his virtues, we are betrayed at once into the tears of admiration, and into the convulsions of laughter.

Then the Corporal!—how finely are the traits of his disposition and manners, though of the same complexion, kept apart from those of his master!—What mutual and beautiful light do they throw upon each other! besides affording an admirable moral lesson, concerning the duty of that indulgent kindness, which lightens and sweetens servitude, and of that reverence to which a good master has a claim from his dependents!

Then Slop!—you must allow me to say inimitable Slop! Where will you shew me his prototype?—and O! the acute angle of the garden-wall! Obadiah! the coach horse! the mud! the doctor! and his poney! That story alone, so originally conceived, so happily told, outweighs, in

my opinion, all the writings of Smollett, in the scale of genius.

Then for the simply pathetic, shew me the equal of Le Fevre, and his duteous boy!—Ah! my friend, can I learn to think these thrilling recollections the prejudices of girlism, and the echo of other people's opinions?

Surely there is no shadow of resemblance between the Dorothea of Cervantes, and the Maria of Sterne, except in their itinerancy, and in the perfidy of their lovers. Nothing can be more unlike than their characters. The soft shades of insanity thrown over the woes of Maria, render her little mournful sallies a million of times more touching than the studied and minute circumlocution with which Dorothea relates her story.

The wild, yet slow air, which Maria plays to the virgin—her pathetic address to the dog, which she has in a string—"*Thou* shalt not leave me Sylvio!" alluding at once, in those few words, to the desertion of her lover, and to the death of her father;—ah! surely these traits, with many resembling ones, are in the genuine hues of tender sorrow! Strange does it appear to me, when such hearts as Mr Gregory's refuse to recognise, with the thrill of admiration, their pathos, and their truth! More do they interest me for the fair bereaved, than I could ever be interested for a bushel

of such indistinct personages of the imagination as Dorothea. We are told that she weeps, but she says nothing that inclines us to weep with her. She yielded to her lover, not through affection, but interest, nor deigns she to bestow one regret on the parents she has deserted. Nature and probability are outraged, when such a character is held up to us as amiable; and surely justice is not less violated, when it is pronounced the prototype of the forsaken, gentle, duteous, tender, and simply-eloquent Maria.

It appears from Gray's letters, that he despised, as a stupid, uninteresting, affected performance, the Nouvelle Heloise, though Mason had professed himself fascinated by its graces—and also, that while Gray idolized Ossian, to Mason it appeared a worthless, bombastic imposition on the credulity of the public. I believe it comes to this at last,

> "Some wayward spirit hovers o'er the brain,
> And twists opinions, in contempt of justice;"

That though highly to please a mind of genius is proof of an author's merit, yet, that to displease a man of ability, is not by any means so sure a sign that he writes ill. Ossian must have sublimity, though Mason and Hayley are blind to it, or

Gray would not have asserted that imagination resided, many hundred years since, in all her pomp, on the bleak and barren mountains of Scotland. So, in despite of Gray, is the Nouvelle Heloise an exquisite performance, or it could not, like the writings of Sterne, have delighted numbers who are familiar with the requisites of fine writing, and know how to separate the dross of composition from its gold.

Forgive this second struggle for the fame of Sterne. With less honour for your judgment I had not molested your disapprobation. If your dislike is invincible, we will mention him no more—since, were I to become your proselyte on this subject, it must be at the expence of my gratitude, for many an hour that has been softened by his pathos, and gilded by his wit. Adieu!

LETTER XLV.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ. on his REVOLUTION POEM.

Lichfield, Nov. 9, 1788.

MY dear Bard, after having been vainly looking and longing, through four whole months, for a letter from Eartham, permit me to thank you for your billet, and for the kindness of its style. For the intelligence it conveyed, that your health was somewhat amended, my heart offered up its instant thanks to Heaven.

It is with unclouded gratitude, that I acknowledge the receipt of your infinitely welcome poetic present. The centennial birth-day of English liberty, and the memory of Doctor Johnson's *rascal* (blistered should have been the tongue that called him so) had a just claim upon the pen of Britain's darling bard. Well has it discharged the debt it owed. I feel assured, that the poetic beauties are more numerous than any other lyrist could have given to a subject so hackneyed, and where the calm phlegmatic character of its hero, restrained the efflorescence of the imagination, under the guid-

ance of a judgment, chaste and veritable as Mr Hayley's.

Mr Mason I see advertises an ode on the same occasion. I long to read it. Interesting indeed is the poetic race, when two such coursers start a-breast,

"With necks in thunder cloth'd, and long resounding pace."

His muse has given an impression not much in favour of the heart of our deliverer, in the first book of his English Garden:

——— "Great Nature lay,
Defac'd, deflower'd, thro' many a ruthless year,
Alike when Charles, the abject tool of France,
Came back to smile his subjects into slaves,
Or Belgic William, with his warrior frown,
Coldly declar'd them free."

For your ode my dear bard—Poetry, in all her stores, has no sublimer painting, than the conclusion of the 5th stanza. After that grand picture, which, to the muse-directed eye, comes so forward in the composition, my next favourite parts, are—the nervous conclusion of the 2d stanza; and, in the 9th, the just exaltation of the plain, honest, brave, moderate spirit of William, over the oppressive selfishness of that polished despot, Lewis

XIV., also the very fine picture of the Tornado; only that "science-pointed steel" does not instantly present the image of a gun being fired.

Amidst a succession of sweet passages in the epistle, those which charm me most, are the eight lines, which begin, "Yet, yet I mount"—the four that begin, "No, when the infernal spirit of despair"—his *name* breaking the spells, how charming that is!—nor less charming the beautiful allusion to the dove and the ark.

Nothing can be finer than the anathema poured forth, with so much rapid fire, against the boasted rising sun of France. You, even *you*, never gave us a more gloriously poetic passage.

Your portrait of William, at the battle of the Boyne, in this poem, displays another sort of image than that presented by West's pencil, which I never liked. The short abrupt hint, given by filial tenderness, is charming; but forgive me for owning that I could have wished the two lines, which bring the humanity of William into competition with the mercy of God, had been omitted. The spirited tenderness of the last twelve lines delights me.

It is curious, that the Jacobite, Sam Wesley, left a spirited eulogium on the courage of William in Holland.

"Thus great Nassau oppos'd the Gallic reign,
And found the Belgian mounds, and ramparts vain;
Dauntless, tho' foil'd, and, tho' outnumber'd, bold,
Unaw'd by faction, and unbrib'd by gold,
Not e'en a spot unfought the hero gave,
No! till his foes had earn'd it, not a grave;
Late in the farthest dyke resolved to lie,
Till then, to *battle*, and but there to *die!*"

Our friend Nichols has published Cary's sonnets. They might have been corrected to advantage, had he employed the hand of friendship in a task, of which you have finely described the use, even to the best poets, in your epistles on epic poetry. In spite of now and then a little hardness in the expressions, I dare believe you will think them charming, since you will recollect the blossoming age of their author. When he brought them to me last week, he said, with a deep sigh, "I wish Mr Hayley may look at a few of them." Send him a copy, said I: "Ah no! I cannot be so obtrusive. If he should take no notice of even a tribute so worthless I should be wounded, nor can I wish he should have the trouble of writing one line of acknowledgment for what perhaps he might not endure to read."

We have another self-taught genius, of very considerable strength, from the banks of the Avon, his name, Weston, organist of Solihul. In

the Gentleman's Magazine for September last, there is a sonnet of his to Cary and Lister. I thought it so exquisite as to believe it yours, for indeed I never saw a more beautiful one of any origin, however splendid.

Last summer I met with a subject for a Runic ode, that appeared to me very sublime, and though it had been put into verse a few years since, by a very charming poet, a friend of mine, whose name is Mathias, yet I thought not with all the effect of which, by expansion, the subject appeared to be capable. It struck me as presenting a prodigiously fine instant to the fire-tipt pencil of Wright. He thinks it does, for I sent him a copy of my poem, and he writes to me as intending to go to work with it.

Though I sicken at the idea of publishing, and have no thoughts of so great a daring at present, yet I should be glad my Runic poem had the advantage of your correcting eye, since it may possibly one day see the light. I do not, however, mean to obtrude it upon your attention, in your present situation, where a thousand more interesting objects solicit that honour. When you return to the sylvan cell, and have leisure to explore a funeral forest at midnight, with an Amazonian nymph, opening her father's tomb by ma-

gic spells, and forcing from thence an enchanted sword, which ascends in a pillar of fire from the withered hands of a warrior's corse, my muse may trip to Eartham, under Mr Selwyn's convoy, and lead you thither.

I hope the dear Romney is well, to whom I beseech you will say for me every thing that is affectionate and grateful.

Mrs Knowles passed a fortnight with me in August. She says Romney's picture of me is one of the finest portraits she ever saw. I sent for the handsomest frame London would produce. It "emblazes, with its breadth of gold," the centre of the dining-room, opposite the fire-place. I keep the one by poor Kettle, for which you know I sat at nineteen, as a foil to Titiano's, and am diverted with people taking it for my mother's picture, after they have looked at Romney's.

I hope Mr Long is well; he has my best wishes. Adieu! my dear bard, Adieu!

LETTER XLVI.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Nov. 19, 1788.

THE generous wish you express to serve the sweet, the interesting Mrs B., had drawn an immediate letter from me, could I, with gratitude, have set aside some other claims upon my pen.

It was with a pensive smile that I looked at your distinction, "*his* brothers," well knowing that she never knew the sweets or the protection of the parental or fraternal ties; but since these gentlemen are prosperous, and tolerably affluent, it is strangely unfeeling, that they should suffer so amiable a sister-in-law to labour for her daily bread, in a situation scarce above that of a common servant, and much more harrassing. Yet lives there one whose still more bounden duty it is to consider her as his child, so far at least as to shield her from the miseries of apprehended want, and from fatigues to which her tender degree of strength is incompetent. This *one* gives away two-thirds of a large income in charity—or rather alms; but gloomy stoicism, and sour-headed in-

fidelity, are, amidst an ostentatious display of moral exertions, wondrous prone to neglect and defy the claims of obvious duties.

Did you hear Mr Jephson speak Mr Hayley's charming Ode on the centennial birth-day of English liberty? What would I not have given to have heard it?

I groan over the coldness of our beautiful city—to whom inanimate nature has been so bounteous, sensibility so much a niggard—where genius is neglected, and the blessings of liberty unvalued.

While the rest of the nation lifted up the voice of thanksgiving—while every neighbouring town, and even village, gave some testimony of commemorating gratitude, no flowing bowls passed round the tables of our thankless citizens:

> "No festal dances—no harmonious songs!"

Do they not deserve to be transplanted from their fertile and sylvan fields,

> "Into some grave and foggy air,
> Where mountain-zephyr never blew;
> To marshy levels, lank, and bare,
> Which Pan, which Ceres never knew:
> Where sleeps a pale discolour'd sea
> Upon the low and reedy shore."

We have a genius of luxuriant blossom in our neighbourhood, of the name of Cary. He has a Lichfieldian friend of the same age, whose name is Lister, and who writes verses almost as well. The following sonnet, which I think exquisite, was written and addressed to them by a self-taught bard, organist of Solihul in Warwickshire:

To Messrs Cary and Lister.

SONNET.

Yet, yet your unpolluted stores with-hold,
Bright buds of genius, bursting into day!
Spite of propitious Phœbus' cheering ray,
Parnassian climes are chilling, *chilling* cold.
In vain ye glad th' enamour'd breeze, unfold
In vain your rich luxuriant foliage, gay
With orient hues—that, blushing, ye display
Tyre's bloom imperial, streak'd with Ophir's gold!
Nor scent, nor beauty,—trust the warning verse,
Unconscious hapless pair! shall ought avail;
Envy, th' expanding blossom's cankering curse,
Shall gnaw,—detraction's instant blight assail
Your shrinking forms, and sportive scorn disperse
Your wither'd honours to the sighing gale.

Notwithstanding this sweet pensive warning, Cary has just published a set of sonnets, which I ardently wish may sell and be admired. Some of them are highly beautiful, others want the chissel a little. Adieu.

LETTER XLVII.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, Nov. 25, 1788.

No, dear Sophia, I could not possibly consider you as a letter in my debt, well aware that I was in yours for many an interesting and eloquent page. It was my intention soon to have made you the bankrupt's offer of a shilling in the pound, —all I can, beneath the consciousness of being unable, with my pen, to afford you any sort of recompense for the inroads which its useless diffuseness would make upon your leisure.

Without any reason to think that your letters are not delightful to me, you profess to dislike writing. I know how your time must be engrossed, so that it would be infatuation in me to

persevere in my former habits of wearying you with dissertations, since the mill-horse round of my existence deprives my pen of those resources which pour in, on every side, upon yours.

If you think me unreasonable in imputing Mr H———'s long silences and short letters to chilled and faded regard, who knows my avidity for his epistles; surely, Sophia, you have no reason to consider the shortness or infrequency of mine in that light, who declared to me, that the only letters you liked were those for which, possessing neither wit nor humour, my powers of intellect are not responsible. However, in my letter of April the 15th, I sent you a singular portrait of a Being, who bears your name, and which, I thought, might have engaged your attention; but you took no notice of it when you wrote to me in reply.

It was not right in Miss W. to tell Mr ——— of the hint I had given concerning the aguish-disposition of his affections. The letter of her's to which that of mine replied, mentioned, with a visible sense of pain, that when he was last in town, he only left his name at her door. It is natural to feel some degree of comfort under mortifications of this sort, from a knowledge that others are fellow-sufferers with us. Beneath the influence of that idea, I told her the too great reason I had

to fear he was not slandered by an imputed tendency to grow tired of his friends, if they were not useful to him in his literary business.

There is surely a mistake about Mr ——— refusing to meet D——, since I know they are intimate friends. I both wonder at, and am sorry for, his thus refusing the desires of other ingenious men to see and converse with him. It wears a cold ungrateful appearance, and certainly retards the popularity of his glorious writings. 'Tis very strange!—If he had not conversational powers, or if he were personally unpleasing, there would be less wonder; but he, of whose countenance, grace of figure, address, and polished insinuation of manners, your glowing description is no flattered portrait—why should *he* be thus unkindly repellant? I am very glad you have been favoured with an interview; at his own request too!—but you must not impute to my influence a distinction so flattering. I was no other way instrumental in your obtaining it, than by giving him a just portrait of you. He is a gallant man, and would not refuse, for once at least, to gratify a charming woman's longing.

The mutual guess of yourself and your fair friend was not erroneous. The two essays you mentioned, Clarissa defended against Cumber-

land, in Variety, are mine. I could not resist the author's solicitations for a couple of papers. The rest of them, which are chiefly sprightly, appear to me much in the style of the Spectators; easy, playful, sometimes witty, and alway humorous, when humour is attempted. I have not seen a line of P.'s since his strange Ode to the great Howard.

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I do not wonder that the Regent was rejected in Ireland, through indignation to see it celebrated, and extolled above the glorious compositions of their, in this day, matchless Jephson.

There is little wonder that your brother should often fall into silent and pensive musings, after the doubtless painful sacrifice he has made. I love and esteem him for the generous indulgence he has ever shewn to your wishes.

I am much interested in your account of the theatres, and still more am I grateful for your kind wish of seeing me in town; but habit makes me more and more a recluse, at least, so far as to inspire a consciousness of wanting spirits to encounter those fatiguing hurries, in which my extended connections always involve me when I am

in London. While my dearest father lives, all ideas of such an excursion are out of the question.

I am afraid there is no hope of the king's life, though it is an event so much to be wished. A course of strict abstemiousness from early youth, with the late appearance of gouty symptoms, made him a most improper subject for Cheltenham waters. They have destroyed him.

Miss Charlotte Rogers is with me at present, and is the most improved young woman imaginable, as to mental qualifications. Since Mrs Stokes's marriage, Charlotte has learnt the value of her sister's talents and information, which are certainly of a very superior class, and has availed herself of them.

We met, in the Dean's Walk yesterday, that vain and flitting piece of learned insanity, Dr S—. He came sailing along in a bombazeen gown and cassoc, at two o'clock on a week day. "Lord! what's that?" exclaimed Charlotte, when we first spied him at some distance; his floating black sleeves, swelled out by the high wind—"It is certainly a black angel." On his near approach, "How do you do, Dr S——?" "In mourning for George the Third, double mourning for George the Fourth—died last Monday night—physicians,

apothecaries, ministers, all deserted him—made an epitaph in the chaise—hear it:

"The ill he did,—*(Then conceitedly turning his head away, and twirling his hand,)* he did not mean;
The good he did *(action ditto)* he meant;
And thus, when virtues intervene,
The worst advices *(action ditto)* have the best intent."

He then sailed away before us, without saying another word, and has this morning been preaching a funeral sermon for the king.—How mad is all this! Adieu.

LETTER XLVIII.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, Nov. 27, 1788.

Resting on your permission, not to struggle violently for that leisure, of which a thousand less interesting employments have robbed me, your charming little letter has not yet been acknowledged, but it has very, very often been read. How many delightful things does it breathe!—wit, humour, gaiety, affection. Its paragraph,

so characteristic of Cary's mind and manners, I have copied for many of my correspondents, in the hope, that so striking a portrait of the young author, may increase their interest in his publication. You see that his sonnets are out.

You will rejoice to hear, that, by unwearied diligence, in reading slowly aloud, and by speaking deliberately, Lister's articulation has grown so much firmer, that his parents have released him from the shrine of Plutus, and intend to send him to the university.

Giovanni rejoices in Mrs Whalley's good opinion, in her health, in yours, and in that of his floral representatives.

I have too much confidence in the congeniality of our taste, to feel any apprehension of violating sincerity, when I shall descant, with enthusiasm, on the charms of those sylvan glades, which you are rearing

> ———" On the champaign head
> Of the steep mountain."

More and more the leading inhabitants of our little city surprise me by their insensibility. Cold as they have ever been towards genius in every line, could you have believed they would have been senseless to the blessings of freedom; that,

while the voice of glad commemoration resounded over all the nation, it should be hushed as midnight at Lichfield? Was it not "an opaque of nature and the soul?" Have you seen the rival odes by our illustrious bards on this great centennial anniversary? Mr Hayley's contains one image of never-excelled sublimity; and the egotism with which Mr Mason opens, is thrice happy. The Epistle from Mary to William was a juvenile work, written before Mr Hayley's ear for musical numbers had attained its perfection. But one passage in it, the anathema against the boasted Gallic Ship, the Rising Sun, is picturesque poetry, in its highest possible perfection—nor are any of Pope's lines more richly harmonious. Adieu!

LETTER XLIX.

Mr Weston of Solihul.

Lichfield, Dec. 8, 1788.

Amidst the much which gratifies me in the late letters of my friend, I am half angry at his

parading with a request, which I trust he knows me incapable of granting. Too perfect is my confidence in the unerring aim, and in the sharpness of your darts, to shoot in your strong bow, I promise you.

I long to see your two translations of the Latin poem on the Woodmen of Arden, being fully conscious of Mr Morfitt's responsibility for all the classic excellence you tell me it possesses. I wish every translator of beautiful Greek, Latin, and Italian poetry, knew as well as yourself how to transfer its gold, unalloyed by any dross in the process.

You are too hard upon Mason's Ode on the Revolution. The felicity of the egotism with which it opens, is extreme; the exordium is superior to Mr Hayley's on the same subject; yet, on the whole, I think Hayley's ode the richer in poetic matter. Both of them are surely the evident works of great masters, though by no means the greatest of their works.

I cannot say I have read, but I have glanced over parts of Mason's Life of Whitehead, and felt myself often pleased and interested. Let me know what it is for which you will never forgive him. Surely his ridicule upon that malicious tyrant, Johnson, both as an author and a man,

will not prove the never-to-be-pardoned sin. You know I think with you about the abilities, and about the style of the despot; but, strange as it may seem to us, many men of first-rate talents, with Mr Hayley at their head, think his style turgid and laboured. If they sincerely think so, where is the crime of avowing their opinion? They like Addison's Capillaire better than Johnson's Burgundy; but remember, that Johnson has, in his Lives of the Poets, praised the dead small-beer of Blackmore's imagination, and abused the nectared streams of Gray's.

Both of your sonnets please me too well to allow my contending with you for the palm of comparative transcendency respecting either. Perhaps that addressed to me has more genius, that to Cary and Lister more grace. It is said to be an excellence in a sonnet, to have but one thought. These same sonnets appear to me as a couple of beautiful rings,—one a cluster of sapphires, amethysts, and diamonds,—the other, a large single brilliant, of the first water.

Nichols has certainly made the worst possible arrangement of our sonnets. It is like putting a man and his wife to dance together at a ball; and his knowing that yours was written so many months before mine, increases the impropriety of

their appearing together. Yours should not have been printed before the letter; which referred to it, could be admitted. But never mind it; printed remonstrance will but call attention more forcibly to what is made to seem so *very* a bow and curtsey. Adieu!

LETTER L.

Mr Weston.

Lichfield, Jan. 7th, 1789.

As to my anger, whatever my wonder may be at your strong prejudices in favour of my muse, and against the sweet Swan of Twickenham, *anger* is out of the question. It would be affectation, in the first instance, in the last injustice; for have you not a right to assert your own opinions, whatever they may be? I, however, devoutly wish, that, for your own sake and mine, you would greatly soften the hyperbole of your praise of me, and the warmth of your censure upon Pope, since there is such an inevitably

large majority of opinions against yours in both instances.

Mr Morfit's fragment has great beauty. I am pleased and flattered by the similarity in its leading idea to that of my rural sonnet.

Why do you fancy that it was Dr Johnson's blindness to the merits of some of my favourite writers, that produced my conviction concerning the rancour of his spirit?

It appears to me, that you are as unjust to Pope, and to the collective merit of modern poets, as Johnson is to those of almost every poet he depreciates; yet nobody ever heard me reflect upon the general expansion and goodness of your heart.

But perusing, with unprejudiced judgment, the records of his malevolence, given by his friends, that fancy it was, in him, great to be abusive, who can think Johnson's heart a good one?

In the course of many years' personal acquaintance with him, I never knew a single instance in which the praise (from another's lip) of any human being, excepting that of Mrs Thrale, was not a caustic on his spirit; and this, whether their virtues or abilities were the subject of encomium.

What a strange power has prejudice, since it can strike such a mind as yours so blind, as to make you fancy Pope little more than a brilliant versifier, because he successfully endeavoured to polish his numbers high. If ingenious allusions, striking and graceful imagery, sound, perspicuous, and pointed good sense were not, in happy succession, to be found throughout his writings, their beautiful harmonies would be of trivial import to me. Exalted, however, as I think the claims of Pope, I do not place him on any level with Shakespeare and Milton.

Dr Johnson's opinions of poetry are so absurd and inconsistent with each other, that, though almost any of his dogmas may be clearly and easily confuted, yet the attempt is but combating an hydra-headed monster.

Pope's indiscriminate aversion to the Alexandrine verse is as ill-judged as Dryden's licentious use of it. In the lyric measure, it gives great dignity to the close of a stanza, if its cesura is properly placed. In the couplet-measure, it also gives energy and grace to the close of a passage; but its effect appears to me always bad, when placed in the middle of a sentence. I like the sense to overflow the couplet, as you ingeniously express it, oftener than it ever does in Pope and Johnson.

Have you reflected, that the most brilliant and celebrated of Dryden's works (his noble Ode excepted) are paraphrastic translations from Chaucer, &c. Neither he nor Pope have one original poem so rich in poetic invention, that first gift of the muses, as Hayley's Triumphs of Temper. Then, what stuff has Dryden left amidst his excellencies, what bombast?—What tame *did* and *do* prosing!—What wretched conceits!

My ear seldom quarrels with the imperfect rhymes in any situation. I find them in the most harmonious verses of Dryden, Pope, Gray, Mason, Collins, Beattie, &c. which seem not the less musical for their admission. With regard to the other circumstances that concur to form the polish and sweetness of numbers, I would have no author spare his pains to procure them. Unpolished verse is much more apparently laborious, than where art has been skilfully applied. Let us apply it, therefore, as assiduously as possible, always remembering, however, that the music of numbers is a subordinate excellence, to which sense and picture ought never to be sacrificed. If to present them with an high degree of strength or grace, is only to be done by dispensing with a little hardness in the measure, an hiatus, or an unpleasant alliteration, we should sacrifice the less to the greater excellence; nor, in that case, mind

a defect that respects the sound merely, unless the measure is absolutely broken, and the ancient and established rules of versification infringed. And so terminates the history of my ideas concerning the duties a poet owes to the formation of his numbers.

LETTER LI.

Mrs Hayley.

Lichfield, Jan. 11, 1789.

You inquire, dearest Madam, my opinion of Mr Hayley's Revolution Ode. His return home has doubtless furnished you with them, for to him did I ingenuously breathe them, as they arose on my first perusals. Amidst the much that I found to admire, the most material of my few objections Dr Warner has obviated, by communicating the new discovery of the Tornado—its dispersing upon any sharp-pointed steel being presented to it. This discovery leaves the simile, and its application, one of the most beautiful and perfect passages English poetry can boast.

Why, I wonder, will Nichols disgrace his ma-

gazine by admitting such impudent fool's-head criticisms, as appear in his last, on this ode of the bard's?—a fellow who tells Mr Hayley, that though force is synonymous to strength in the French language, it is not in ours. Johnson would have taught the puppy better, whose whole letter proves that he ought not to budge a foot out of the dictionary leading-strings.

I will not disobey you, my dear Mrs Hayley, and, after the example of the bard, who often passes over in silence my request to know his opinions on popular compositions, be dumb to your inquiring after my opinion of Emeline; yet had I rather you had not questioned me, since I cannot be disingenuous, and cannot suffer the pleasing bribe in Mr Hayley's last lines to influence my judgment. The scenic descriptions in the first volume pleased me extremely; but I confess that was all which pleased me in the course of the work. It is a weak and servile imitation of Cecilia, and I have seldom felt more wearied, or less interested than by the personages of this vapid drama. Early in its perusal, I felt disgusted by the manners of the heroine, which, in her situation, it was so utterly impossible she should have acquired. Emeline's advantages were infinitely fewer than Caroline's de Lichfield. The old canoness had once lived about court, and,

though romantic and indiscreet, her address could not be supposed to be deficient in the exterior forms of politeness; yet, even under that consideration, and that also of her having passed three months at Court, the authoress of Caroline judiciously gives to her heroine's first manners that wild, artless, engaging simplicity, of which we find nothing in Emeline. It is the last thing we can dispense with in her who had conversed only with peasants, excepting one honest, yet inelegant, old woman; an old steward, as homespun; and a vulgar-minded cunning attorney.

No intuitive strength of understanding, no possible degree of native sensibility, could have enabled her to acquire the "do me honour" language of high-life, and all the punctilious etiquette of its proprieties, with which she receives the old and young lord at the castle.

Nor was I less disgusted with the unfeeling indelicacy with which Adelaide, in the detail of her humiliating story, talks about her caps and feathers, and the admiration which was paid to her elegance in dress, and to the beauty of her person.

The ardent passion and reformation of Edwards, appear to me wholly incompatible with that libertine callousness with which he is represented in the first volumes.

I have always been told, that Mrs Smith designed, nay that she acknowledges, the characters of Mrs and Mr Stafford to be drawn for herself and her husband.

Whatever may be Mr Smith's faults, surely it was as wrong as indelicate to hold up the man, whose name she bears, the father of her children, to public contempt in a novel.

Then how sickening is the boundless vanity with which Mrs Smith asserts that herself, under the name of Mrs Stafford, is "a woman of first-rate talents, cultivated to the highest-possible degree."

So far from giving proofs of these self-imputed, peerless talents, Mrs Stafford does not speak a single word, does not write one letter, to which moderate talents, with a but tolerable education, might not be competent.

The parade the author makes with her knowledge of a language, in which every boarding-school miss is instructed; the frippery of its interlarded phrases, and her frequent vulgarisms in our own language, combined to make me dislike the style, as much as I had disliked the unnatural manner in which several of the characters are drawn.

At the conversational vulgarisms, I own I wonder extremely, as Mrs Smith's poetry, though

feeble, is not inelegant, and as I understand she is a woman of education.

When Emeline first says of the fainting Adelaide, " she is coming o," I concluded the press had accidentally omitted to add the word " herself;" but in a page after, the same kitchen-phrase is repeated by Emeline, " yes, she is certainly coming to." In another place we find, " Emeline grew white at the intelligence." *White,* instead of *pale,* I have often heard servants say, but never a gentleman or a gentlewoman.

I fancy this lady has been so fortunate to engage yours and Mr Hayley's benevolent amity; that it draws a veil over all the defects, and magnifies every grace of her compositions; but you will remember, that I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs Smith, and, therefore, read her works with the same indifference I do those whose authors died before I was in existence.

My very foes acquit me of harbouring one grain of envy in my bosom; yet it is surely by no means inconsistent with that exemption, surely it belongs to a native love of justice, to feel a little indignant, and to enter one's protest, when compositions of mere mediocrity, such as I own I think Mrs Smith's Sonnets, are extolled far above those of real genius. These same sonnets have been

more extolled than the classic elegance and refined grace of Mrs Barbauld's poems; than the correct and perspicuous good sense of Miss More's, often animated by original, striking, and graceful imagery; than the wit and attic spirit of Mrs Piozzi's writings; and greatly more than the sublime and beautiful creations of our Helen Williams's imagination.

My poor father, who was all honesty in his literary opinions, and who warmly delighted in the genius of his contemporaries, used to feel just in this manner over the undue celebration of Glover's Leonidas, when the whole national taste seemed under the fascination of investing it with the highest honours. However, my father's existence has more than thirty years survived the fame of Leonidas:—"a new blown bubble of the day," which burst almost as suddenly as it was formed.

With my learned, but too fastidious, neighbour, Mr Grove, I was the other day contending for the existence of more genius in one of our minor poets, than he would hear of. "Ay," said he, "you always sit down to see new verses with such a disposition to praise, that I do not always trust your encomiums. They must be bad, indeed, if you can find nothing in them with which to be pleased."

It is true, I often fight Mr G.'s coldness, but he thinks scarce less highly of the dear bard's writings than myself. This similarity proves as good as the bark to our literary hectics.

I am glad you find Mr Hayley's adopted boy a pleasing companion; that his understanding is firm, and his heart good; but you say he is not poetical. The absence of that faculty in him, proves that poetry is a present that nature only can make; and not to be implanted by any power of education, by the force of early habit, or by the imitative ardour of childhood. I cannot help being sorry to hear that the coarse wit of Swift, and the burlesque of Anstey, are preferred to the finer sallies of the imagination by a young mind, especially his, around which her purest emanations so perpetually play.

Why sleeps Mr Sargent's muse, that once awaked "so sweetly, and so well?" Adieu!

LETTER LII.

REV. —— BERWICK.

Lichfield, Jan. 20, 1789.

IT has been in vain that I wished earlier to transmit my congratulations on the brightening prospect in the region of friendship from Lady Moira's amendment. May all the clouds of disease soon disperse from that fair horizon!

I am sure you have felt for dear Lady Carhampton, mourning the loss of her justly darling son. The resignation with which she sustains this heavy blow is saint-like. O blessed hope of immortality, it is thou only, operating upon the consciousness of a virtuous life, that, beneath deprivations like these, canst assuage the storm of anguish, and silence the murmurs of complaint.

You plead the controul of the House of Lords for passing three times through Lichfield, as if you had not a friend within its walls. Hang aristocracy, if such are its fruits.

I cannot say that I have read Dr Kippis's Life of Cook, though I have looked into it. When I was upon a visit, of a few days, in Mr Gell's fa-

mily, in Derbyshire, it first met my eye. Our society was too interesting, to permit much attention to books; and, I confess, the style did not please me sufficiently, to excite much avidity for an entire and attentive perusal. Familiar as are the public with the events of that great man's life, and with all the traits of his character, it required more than common abilities that should strike out new lights, and, at least, throw the splendour of fine style over a subject so perfectly known.

Miss William's Ode seems the gem of the Doctor's work. It is very sublime. That young lady's talents are indeed an honour to our sex. Her disposition is as amiable as her imagination is vivid and original.

It will probably be thought, that we both ought to make low curtseys to the learned editor, for the praise he deigns to bestow on the efforts of the Misses; but, lest we should grow too vain of that praise, immediately after having bestowed it, he observes how much it must be regretted, that some writer of eminence, Cowper or Hayley, does not take up a subject, so worthy of their pen, and do justice to merit and heroism so distinguished.

However true this may be, and with whatever propriety the observation might have been made in any other part of the work, it was pedant im-

politeness to insert it in exactly the place it stands. Adieu!

LETTER LIII.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield; Jan. 29, 1789.

ALAS! my dear Bard, to how many of your friends has this year been fatal. With grief I now see the mournful list swelled by the name of Miers. He was a Being in whom genius, benevolence, and modesty were conspicuously blended. The celebrated Wyatt seems the twin spirit of poor Miers.

Inclosed you will find a transcript of my Runic dialogue. The imperfect rhymes will I fear offend you, and yet I confess myself incorrigible on that head. Mingling occasionally with the more perfect ones, they relieve my ear, as in music it is relieved by the intermixture of discords. It seems impossible to banish them, even considering them as blemishes, without sacrificing to an excellence so very subordinate the higher graces of poetry. Pope and Gray, in whose

works they occur so often, must have used them upon deliberation, and by free choice, as not thinking them defects; else, taking such confessed pains to polish, and perfect their poetry, we may be assured they would have banished the rhyme of less complete jingle.

Mr Cary is very grateful for the kind interest you take in his peace, and in his fame, and beyond measure gratified that you have been pleased with his sonnets. Since our first acquaintance I have assiduously endeavoured to instil the just and necessary cautions your letter breathes; but the slow sale which you mention, of a poem of that eminence, must give them irresistible weight. It is a circumstance which verifies the indignant prophecy of my spirit, on first reading Johnson's Lives of the Poets. I foresaw that the contempt, with which so many of the most exalted in that tribe are there treated by an author, whom the nation at large seems to consider as oracular, would, like the Gothic clouds, spread a night over the English Parnassus, which might probably darken, till no degree of genius, however splendid, should be able to pierce it.

I confess, my dear Bard, that in the prefatory sonnet to Mr Cary's publication, I wished, and designed to combat the doctrine, held out by Mrs Smith, in her preface to the first edition of her

sonnets, viz. that the legitimate sonnet is not suited to the genius of our language. Now that same true-born sonnet is, with me, a very favourite branch of poetry. The best of Milton's, I have always thought, formed the model for sonnet-writing, which, demanding the gracefully undulating pauses of blank verse, happily blends the nature of blank verse with that of rhyme. Its name seems to call for light composition; not so its nature, if Petrarch and Milton may be allowed to have understood it. Mrs Smith's have the gravity, but appear to me deficient in every other characteristic of that order of verse. I have seen the legitimate sonnet exquisitely beautiful, not only from yours, but from various pens.

Reproving me for not liking Mrs Smith's sonnets, and trying to enlist my vanity against my want of taste for them, makes me fear that my dear Bard suspects me of speaking rather from grudging spleen, than from involuntary opinion. He has never had cause to think me capable of envious coldness. That lady's opinion of my works, if indeed she professes to like them, does me honour, but cannot change the nature of my perceptions.

Mrs Smith's versification is melodious—but that appears to me a subordinate excellence in poetry. I do not find in her sonnets any original

ideas, any vigour of thought, any striking imagery—but plagiarism, glaring and perpetual;—whole lines taken verbatim, and without acknowledgment from Shakespeare, Milton, Young, Pope, Gray, Collins, Mason, and Beattie.

When I see an author reduced to crib an whole line from Young's Night Thoughts, another whole line from Mason's Elegy on Lady Coventry, and two whole lines from Shakespeare, to make up a little poem, which contains only fourteen lines, I cannot help concluding that the imagination is barren. Yet is it even so with the eighth sonnet in Mrs Smith's first edition.

I have not seen the second edition, but am told that she has in that put the quotation marks so disingenuously withheld in the first publication. She has there, among many other plagiarisms, as notorious, given this line as her own,

"And drink delicious poison from her eyes."

But if, after all, you sincerely think there is genuine poetic genius in Mrs Smith's sonnets, you should not condemn in me, as illiberal, a contrary opinion, recollecting the wide extreme of Gray and Mason's ideas, on Ossian's Poetry, and on Rousseau's Eloisa.

Giovanni is, I hope, recovering, and my aged

nursling has wonderfully well sustained the late cutting blasts. They were, I apprehend, more welcome to your peculiar constitution, than milder gales.

I have great delight in the information concerning your improving health, and have observed, that when the vital light has been clouded and inauspicious through youth, it often grows permanently clear and serene, as life advances. So be it with my dear bard!—Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER LIV.

Mrs Knowles.

Lichfield, Feb. 1, 1789.

And what becomes of my brilliant Mrs Knowles? I long for her spirited and ever-eloquent remarks, upon the sudden, barefaced, disgraceful adoption of Tory principles, by those who so lately affected to triumph in the blessings of the Revolution.

And how goes on the combination between

George's learning, and his mother's genius, marching hand in hand over Horatian ground?

I, who was always enamoured of the legitimate Miltonic sonnet, write one now and then, upon that model. It is the intermediate style of poetry, between rhyme and blank verse; and the undulating and varied pauses of the latter, give to the true sonnet an air of graceful freedom, beyond that of all other measures—though, from the restraint respecting the exact number of the lines, and the demand of four rhymes, twice used in the first eight verses, it is in reality the most difficult.

However, where there is tolerable vigour of intellect, difficulty rather stimulates than discourages. An appearance in rural nature, a thrill of the spirit from affectionate recollections, or a sentiment, or a reflection, strikes us. It would do little towards the composition of an extensive poem, but it happily, perhaps, occupies the dimensions of a sonnet. Therefore is it that that order of verse suits a mind which has more propensity to poetic efforts, than leisure to employ them. It is true, we may sooner write forty lines, in any other measure, than fourteen in that of the true sonnet—but I can easier write fourteen on that arduous model, than an hundred on the easier ones—and where new matter is allowed to flow

in to the first idea, we are led into expansion, inconsistent with the claims of domestic business, the stewardship of a fluctuating income, the intercourse of society, and the duties of correspondence. I present you with four* of my sonnets, that have not yet passed the press—but which, if I may trust the report of several literary friends, rank with the best of my compositions.

In what more than usual austerity did winter frown upon us, in the late zenith of his blank dominion! You will be sure I trembled for its effects upon the full of days; yet, by the counteraction of large fires, and an increased quantity of vinous cordials, he seemed not to suffer from it at all. Your poor friend Giovanni was not so fortunate. He is but now recovering from a severe illness.

You are, as usual, often inquired after in our circles; which inquire after little that is ingenious, except yourself. Though such inquiry may be, on that account, the higher personal compliment, it will not, therefore, be more welcome. Adieu!

* Viz. That to Ingratitude—the Summer Evening—why Retirement is shunn'd—and that to a Botanic Friend.

LETTER LV.

Mrs Taylor.

Lichfield, Feb. 3, 1789.

Though many letters lie unanswered in my drawer, of remoter date than my dear Mrs Taylor's, and from friends whom I much regard, yet I wave every other claim, that I may answer her kind epistle, before the important hour confines her person, and expands her heart, for the reception of the maternal pleasures.—May they prove an all-recompensing happiness!

Hitherto you have seemed as chiefly born to suffer. I had a strong presentiment that pregnancy would have banished your long oppressive train of previous indispositions, and am disappointed to know that they harassed you so much in the beginning of that period.

Highly amiable are your filial regrets.—O! I can well imagine them! how poignant they were on quitting the home of your youth, the apartment hallowed by the ideal presence of a dying mother, who so lately expired in your arms!—Let us quit the subject.

Your present local sensations must be sweet, from living in the mansion in which that dear fascinating enthusiastic saint, Mrs Rowe, once inhabited. From twelve years old to twenty, not a year elapsed in which I did not rush to a re-perusal of her letters, nor have they yet ceased to thrill my imagination, and to soothe my heart.

It was indeed fervently my design, never again to have sent any thing of mine to the Gentleman's Magazine—but placability, amounting perhaps to weakness, clings about my heart upon every occasion, short of premeditated and apparent treachery practised against me. Nichols, the editor of that publication, is certainly a very ingenious, and, by the report of those who know him well, a very worthy man. It seems he does not take upon himself the department of reviewing poetry. Business brought him through Lichfield last autumn. He called upon me, and expressed concern so fervent for the slight shewn to one of my best works, the Ode to General Elliot, and for the insolence with which his magazine had reviewed Mr Whalley's noble poem, Mont Blanc, that I could not help being softened, nor refuse to remit to him the offences of his reviewer. After he got to town, I received a letter of earnest supplication, to resume my accustomed contributions to his publication—

my placability, not my judgment, induced me to comply.

There are prodigiously fine passages in Mr Hayley's Revolution Ode, and in the Ovidian Epistle subjoined to it. Both are stupidly and impudently criticized in a letter to the Magazine for December last. Nichols ought to have spurned, instead of inserting that letter. About the middle of last month, I sent one of indignant comment, upon that ridiculous censor, and signed mine Anti-Zoilus.

Yet on the whole, perhaps, neither the Ode nor the Epistle are quite equal to some other of Mr Hayley's writings. It is possible to fall somewhat short of them, yet be very fine poems.

We have two youths, not yet either of them seventeen, who display very shining poetic talents. England has had no Aonian flowers of such early beauty and luxuriance, since Chatterton's sun set in blood. Adieu! Adieu!

LETTER LVI.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, Feb. 4, 1789.

That you are not richer in leisure than myself, dear Sophia, I can easily credit, drained as is my treasury of hours and minutes, by domestic and pecuniary business of various kinds, by social interruptions, by a too extensive correspondence, and by attendance upon my aged nursling; but how rapidly the day wastes in London I am too conscious, to wonder at your growing distaste to writing, in spite of the golden mines of information which surround you, and of the powers you possess to refine their treasures, and to give them the most valuable currency. For me, if I had more command over my time, you will allow the comparative barrenness of a provincial town. Since thus it is with us both, it were wise to repose upon each other's regard, without struggling after frequent opportunities to expand it yet again and again, upon paper.

Hourly do I expect dear Mrs Mompessan,—now the oldest friend I have upon earth, except-

ing Mrs Knowles, and my father; my acquaintance with Giovanni not passing into confidential friendship, till some years after Mrs M. honoured me with her's. Justly sings the poetic Bard of Night,

> " Friendship's the wine of life; but friendship new
> Is neither strong nor pure:—but O, how cheers
> Our soul, the bright complexion, cordial warmth,
> And elevating spirit of a friend,
> For twenty summers ripening by our side!"

Alas! the poor king!—his fate is indeed a deep, deep tragedy. The centennial birth-day of the glorious Revolution happened at a somewhat unfortunate period for the party, who make the royal calamity the ladder of their ambition, since the mask of public virtue was to be thrown aside so soon; and since its disuse lays bare their selfishness to the shamed eye of day, in nakedness of tenfold disgrace.

I wonder somebody does not rise in the Senate House, and cry " for shame, for shame!"—within a month—a little month—while the echoes yet vibrate with the sounds " regal restraint," " the salutary curbs of monarchial power," " the peoples' privileges," and " immortal liberty," from your throats: are you now straining them hoarse with clamours for hereditary rights, and the royal pre-

rogative, whose preponderance has ever been fatal to the peace and prosperity of this kingdom!—to oppose whose dangerous inroads, Hambden fought, and Milton abdicated the splendid throne of Parnassus, during twenty years,

> "In liberty's defence—his noble cause,
> Of which all Europe rung from side to side;"

and for which Russell and Sydney were martyred on the block.

When you were met on your processions, which, in the trust that your enthusiasm was from principle, filled with delight the heart of every true Briton, could this apostacy have been foreseen, how would they have burnt to tear your yellow ribands from your brows!—they had at least exclaimed, with the spirit of the deserted Constance,

> ——————"Doff them for shame!
> And hang the rusty chain of Stuart-power
> About your recreant necks!"

But, to change the subject, I do not much wonder that the pageant scenery, and even the Siddonian pathos, in fallen majesty, cannot sufficiently animate that heavy play, Henry the 8th; which, in despite of some great poetic beauties,

is not calculated, on the whole, to rouse attention, and awaken the passions.

So, the little Mrs Jordan seduces the croud from the truly great Mrs Siddons. Each, however, are doubtless exquisite in their different paths.

In the past two years, I have made so great a point of devoting an hour most days to the harpsichord, that I feel my progress in thorough bass, and am much complimented upon it, under the consciousness that all my youth passed away in total ignorance of musical notes. I can now play in little private concerts, with tolerable facility. No small delight to such an enthusiast in the science as your friend.

My celebrated friend, Mr Hardinge, has risen prodigiously of late in my esteem, on account of some nobly generous exertions in favour of sweet Mrs B——, whose story is so extraordinary, and so interesting; whose conduct has been so amiable; whose fate so hard. She was in Lichfield this winter with Mrs Smith, and more graceful, more attractive, much more eloquent than ever, though less beautiful. I mentioned to Mr Hardinge her present distress, and related her eventful history. His exertions in her favour became instantly energetic, and their consequences have

procured a very considerable sum for herself and for her children.

So the world has lost my two friends, Mrs Brooke and Mr Miers; Beings whose talents were first-rate in their different departments, and every way did honour to the age in which they lived. Adieu! Yours faithfully.

LETTER LVII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Feb. 5, 1789.

HAVE the goodness to transmit the inclosed to the penny-post, after having given it a wafer, not merely to save Miss Weston postage, but because I have made a speech for you in it. What would you take as a bribe to give this same Philippic your impressive tones in the senate?

I am delighted with the Chancellor's speech, in which he asserts the superior degree of attachment produced by the expectation of favours, to that which is excited by the receipt of them; where he wittily and eloquently observes, that the zeal of the new-made peer will probably cool be-

fore the wax on his patent, while the peer in expectation is a most steady adherent.

And what is become of your muse?—Is she frightened into silence by the clamours of repressed ambition, struggling around the vacant throne? You have not sent me a sonnet time immemorial, and I sicken in deprivation.

Behold two of mine, and pay me in kind, I pray you. When your muse discharges debt of this sort, she pays them back with interest.

Ask again about the quotation for Mr Croft.

Adio!

LETTER LVIII.

——— Morfitt, Esq.

Lichfield, Feb. 7, 1789.

My best thanks are due to the poetical friends for their elegant copy of their ingenious publication †. I prefer the rhyme translation, not because

* Died at Birmingham in 1809.

† The Woodman of Arden, a poem, written by Mr Morfitt in Latin, and of which his friend, Mr Weston, gave two translations, one in blank verse, the other in rhyme.—*S.*

it is in rhyme, but because it is paraphrastic, and the other close. All close translations have about them an air of ungraceful restraint. I confess also, that it appears to me that our friend has not formed his blank verse after the best examples, viz. Milton, Thomson, and Akenside. Else, however unfashionable, I think blank verse much the superior vehicle for the effusions of genius;—but the often recurrence of the redundant syllable at the end of a line, (so frequent in Mr Weston's poem) is highly injurious to that harmony and freedom which result from the varied pauses, undulating from line to line through the work, and forming, in sound, the magic curve, so dear to beauty; and whose floating course the redundant syllable interrupts. I have never known it used, in any frequency, by the best writers, except in dramatic poetry,—believe it will scarce once be found in the Paradise Lost. Its effect upon my ear, in our friend's translation, is like that which my eye would perceive by sudden jirking curtesies being made by a fine woman, as she was gliding through the Louvre, " with arms sublime that floated on the air."

Milton, Thomson, and Akenside, knew how to give contrasting and picturesque harshness to some of their lines, without this jirking redundancy at their final syllables.

This rhyme-translation is charmingly spirited, though, to my ear, its versification is clogged and encumbered by what Mr W. fancies gives it freedom, the frequent triplet, and the Alexandrine that does not terminate a passage.

I admire our friend's genius, but, in the same degree, do I lament the strength of his prejudices, and the errors of his system. They have betrayed him, through the preface to this work, into mistakes the most glaring, and into injustice to the illustrious band of poets, that, with redoubled rays, have warmed the nation within the last half-century; injustice, that wears the appearance of an invidiousness which, I feel assured, has not, in reality, tainted his honest heart. If I do not publicly enter my protest against his injustice to the writers I revere, the immeasurably high and much unmerited compliments which he pays me in the close of that afflicting preface, together with our known friendship, will make it believed, that our opinions are one respecting his infatuated assertion, that the modern poets have poisoned the Pierian spring.

Mr W. writes, in this preface, as if the excellence, or non-excellence, of a poem, had its final dependence upon the mode of its versification, and as if the couplet were the only order of rhyme. He seems to forget, that the lyric, with its count-

less varieties and unlimited privileges, affords an ample field for his Alexandrines and triplets, whose licentious use suits not the requisite chastity of the couplet-melodies; though the sense frequently overflowing the couplet cannot, I think, be justly termed a violation of that chastity; but it is destroyed by jingling into the botching triplet, or by lagging in Alexandrines, during the middle of a passage. Their effect is majestic, not only at the termination of a poem, but of its sentences, provided a new subject commences immediately.

After all, it is a small part of the intrinsic excellence of poetry, that depends on what the Drydenic slovenliness, or the Popeian elegance, can give or take away. A composition is worth little, that does not remain fine poetry after being taken out of all measure. Where it has sublimity of sentiment, ingenuity of allusion, and strength of imagery, to stand that test, just Taste gives an author leave to do almost what he pleases with the numbers, provided he does not insist upon a preference of the slovenly to the polished ones, readily promising that such a work will be dear to her in any dress.

Mr Weston's reasoning about the eligibility of keeping down certain parts of poetry, upon the painter's system, is perfectly just; but, unfortu-

nately for Dryden, it is no excuse for bombast, fustian, incongruous metaphor, inconsistent fable, and impertinent familiarity of style. These are the corruptions with which he defiled, at times, the living waters of the Pierian spring, to which his fine genius had such constant access.

The only thing which I protest against in our friend's first translation of your poem, is the melting down four brothers into one, by giving them the sign of the person singular. Without a note, nobody could have guessed the meaning of the passage; and though a note is always better than a passage left in obscurity, yet is it highly desirable to avoid all unnecessary expressions, which demand a prose explanation. The epithet fourfold, could not have expressed the idea sufficiently. A mystery at least one degree harder to be conceived than that of the Trinity.

Apropos of compound epithets. How much is our friend out in calling them tinkling, and in ranking them amongst the habits of the Popeian school! They are of the Miltonic school—have a nervous condensing power; and, through an erroneous dread of their producing harshness, were too much disused by Pope and his disciples.

It is not true of Pope, that he polished every thing high. His Satires, his Ethic Epistles, the glorious Dunciad, and even several parts of the

Essay on Man, frequently present passages in a plain unornamented style, though not, it is true, with the *says he's*, and *says she's*, and the *belikes* of Dryden.

Pope's friends, in his lifetime, asserted opinions like these of mine publicly; and Mr Weston injuriously imputes them to his influence, to a design of assassinating the fame of his great predecessor, to which he uniformly bears very ardent testimony, regretting only that he had not learned the art to blot, a regret in which surely all people of just taste must unite.

A friend is with me, whom I quit with reluctance to take up my pen, even to you, who have so much honoured and obliged me. I am, Sir,

Your faithful humble servant.

LETTER LIX.

Mrs Piozzi.

Lichfield, Feb. 13, 1789.

Too sensible am I of the rapidity with which my dear Mrs Piozzi's hours must fleet away, to feel resentment arise and mix with my regrets when she is silent.

I must account to you, dearest Madam, how it came to pass that I knew not, till I received your letter, of the existence of such a poem as Diversity.

My long conviction concerning the total incompetence of our modern public critics to estimate the genuine value of poetic compositions; my nausea of their false rules and blundering analizations, their venal praise and malicious abuse, at length made me resolve to avoid wasting my time over any of them, except the Gentleman's Magazine, to which I often send verses and little essays. It is several years since I have seen any of its brethren, that has not been obtruded upon my attention, and I see only one newspaper, the General Evening. Hence is it that I sometimes

do not hear of fine compositions till they have been out perhaps many weeks; but, sure to hear of them at length, from some of my literary correspondents, I look upon the delay of the pleasure I have in reading them as a less evil in the balance against those hectics which false criticism always gives me. I have ordered Diversity from my bookseller, but it is generally a fortnight at least before I receive the books I bespeak.

The wish you express to see me in town is very flattering; but my father is too feeble to be left. Invalid parents have always made me a great home-keeper. I begin to suspect that the long continuance of stationary habits will make them adhere to my inclinations, even when the precious chains, now entwined around my heart, shall be finally broken.

I was interrupted at the close of my last sentence, and prevented by an eruptive inflammation in my eye-lids, from resuming my pen, except when indispensable business forced it into my fingers. I have, in the interim, seen Major Barry; and I spoke immediately to him of the poem in question. "It is Mr Merry's,—and how do you like it, Colonel?" "I told Mrs Piozzi I could not understand it." "O! you should have read it a second time." "I did not think it worth while

—since one wants time to read better things with the attention they deserve."

He delighted me by saying that your Sonnets are on the eve of publication.

Mr Merry has hitherto appeared to me a writer of considerable genius; but whom self-confidence, and total want of taste, perpetually betrays into bombast, obscurity, and inelegance. Then the Anna Matilda verses are evidently his composition; and is it not very sickening to see an author creeping beneath a veil of gauze, and proclaiming under it, that he is the first poet the world has ever produced?

I have not read Mr Cumberland's novel—nor ever wish to read a novel written by one who has proclaimed the Clarissa of Richardson void of genius, of nature, and inimical to the right formation of the female mind.

I am very sorry Mr Greathead's laurels have suffered a blight, since his virtues interest the wishes of all the generous who know him, for the duration of every thing which promotes his happiness.

Adieu! dearest Madam. My best compliments to Mr Piozzi.

Yours, very faithfully.

LETTER LX.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Feb. 24, 1789.

I HAVE indeed a great deal for which to love you. You are a noble creature.—May the generosity, kindness, and exertion you have devoted to the interests of the amiable, unfortunate Mrs B. be rewarded by many a blessing, superadded to a consciousness that will strew roses over your pillow!

I congratulate you, from my inmost heart, upon the king's recovery, which, I trust, will preserve to us the political saviour of our country.

Your mind has of late, I conclude, been too much engrossed by patriotic solicitudes to receive visits from your muse, though benevolence, through the ever-open passages in your heart, found means to engage your animated attention. The next poetical pleasure you can give me to that of sending me verses of your own, is to hear you avow approbation of mine. It is from you that I learn the existence of the word *idiocy*, as synonymous to *idiotism*. Substituting it for the lat-

ter, my line is rendered much more harmonious. This word is to me as an hidden guinea, just discovered by a miser.

With what original ideas does that brain of yours teem! What spirit and frolic in the manner of your telling me, that one of the two sonnets I sent you had strength, the other softness!

But I am, beyond expression, gratified by your warm approbation of my paraphrastic translations of Horace. The praise of so perfect a master of the beauties of my original, is an armour of steel and gold, against the sneers of the pedant, who demands fidelity in a translation, at the expence of spirit and of grace. I have taken the painter's maxim for my guiding rule in these attempts—"It is better to sin against truth than beauty." Sir John Denham, my friend Weston tells me, justly observes that poetry, like ether, is a very subtle and volatile spirit, which in pouring from one language into another, evaporates so much, that, if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, little more than a *caput mortuum* will remain. Adieu!

LETTER LXI.

Miss Williams.

Lichfield, March 3, 1789.

Your charming poem on the Slave Trade is a most welcome present. It would have given me great pleasure to have covered many pages in discriminating its various graces—but a recent inflammation in my eyes forbids the indulgence.

Self-partiality, which makes us fond of ideas and images that have arisen in our own minds, increases perhaps the solemn feelings, excited by the twelve first lines of your exordium. If your friend, Mr Hardinge, has thought it worth his while to preserve my letters, he could shew you one, written last April, in answer to one of his, which requested me to employ my muse on this popular subject. That letter of mine to Mr Hardinge, described scenery, and expressed ideas exactly similar to those in the first twelve lines of your poem. I never committed them to measure, through utter want of time for compositions of any length. I could obtain it only by the sacri-

fice of more material things—my duties—my common-life business—and my friends.

Perhaps I wish this poem of yours had been written in the ten-feet couplet, of whose graces and powers you are so eminently mistress. I think that of eight feet requires the frequent intermixture of the line of seven syllables, in either very solemn, or very sprightly compositions, to give spirit and variety to the measure. Observe how often the seven feet line recurs in the Allegro, Il Penseroso, and in Gray's Descent of Odin.

Amongst many other happinesses in your last poem, it has great originality and beauty in its similes.

I am gratified that Mrs Siddons chose one of my darling plays for her benefit. How charming must the Law of Lombardy have been, arrayed in her graces, and in her powers! Its characters are drawn with the free hand of a master, who takes human nature rather than theatric precision for his model—and its language has Shakesperian ease and fire. Our public critics abuse it—but they are almost all composed of bad authors, whose enmity to good ones is inevitable, and, towards Mr Jephson, national jealousy increases their venom.

Charming Mrs Piozzi recommends Della Crusca's Diversity to me, as an extremely fine poem—and Mr Hayley tells me, that Mrs Smith's Pegasus is of the true etherial breed—of whose Sonnets, in my opinion, Colonel Barry, as justly as wittily, said, when he was last here, that the general run of them was two or three good lines, stolen from our most popular poets, dispersed here and there in each sonnet, with ten or a dozen others of very indifferent cement.

> "Alas! my gentle Helen, how must I,
> Who will not flatter, and who dare not lie,"

have wounded you with cold praise, had you sent me poems with as little original poetic matter as Mrs Smith's Sonnets; or strutting in such inflated defiance of every thing like common sense, as the compositions of Della Crusca!—not but there are considerable flashes of genius in the latter, but to me they serve only to make the general darkness more visible. Such odes as Diversity will confirm, instead of invalidating Mr Mason's objection to the irregular ode—yet, since Dryden and Lord Lyttleton have proved the possibility of making sublime and beautiful poems upon that model, I wonder at Mason's reprobat-

ing it. We may venture to pronounce, that a composition, which fails to interest us in irregular lyrics, would not please us better, if we were to see it reduced to the regular form—though fine odes are certainly the more perfect on that account. Adieu! my dear Miss Williams,—your's faithfully.

LETTER LXII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 5, 1789.

THE evidence you bring of Mr B——'s bachelor voluptuousness, is irresistibly strong. I suppose Mr Day knew it not, or, with his general abhorrence of sensuality, he had spared to mention him with so much esteem:—but, Lord! what a pale, maidenish-looking animal for a voluptuary! —so reserved as were his manners!—and his countenance!—a very tablet, upon which the ten commandments seemed written.

There is sublime allegoric imagery in your son-

net to Pitt*. I like the two first lines the least—and do not approve of two torches in one sonnet, the light of virtue, and the flame of honour. If it was mine I would alter the opening, thus,

> Genius and virtue's prodigy, thy fame
> Through ages shall diffuse its cloudless light.

"Thee Britain found," I do not think sufficiently clear, unless it had been in her late emergency, that she had first found her political saviour.

SONNET TO MR PITT,

By G. HARDINGE, ESQ. *written March* 1789.

O! miracle of sure, tho' early fame,
By genius prov'd, and sacred virtue's light,
Thee Britain found in her tempestuous night,
When Belial, starting from the bonds of shame,
With frantic joy, and guilt's avenging might,
Threaten'd in radiant panoply the fight;
The arm that waved imperial honour's flame,
Reveal'd those hideous phantoms of the night,
That hover'd, brooding, o'er the regal bed,
In shapeless folds of dusky hue;—the pale
Half-rebel Fear,—to venal homage bred,
And Perfidy, that marks the shifting gale
Obsequious—idiot Scorn, tho' nature bled,
And perjur'd Craft in duty's hallow'd veil.

My objection might be obviated thus :—

" Thee Britain found, strong in her stormy night."

Invincible is the word, but there is not room for it. In the sonnet, how often does language find herself on the bed of Procrustes! All the rest of this composition has Miltonic sublimity. The picture, as an whole, is infinitely grand. The night fiends brooding o'er the regal bed, and discovered by the torch of honour! Nothing can be more sublime; though poets only will perhaps properly feel this oracular imagery, at least without a key, but it is the kind of thing in which a portion of obscurity is rather an excellence than a defect—I mean as to the imagery merely, for nothing can preserve from just censure obscurity of expression.

My poor sonnets are made delectable nonsense in the General Evening Post for the 7th of this month, March, by the carelessness of the printer, who, in reversing the words *hills* and *rills*, has caused my hills to wind and to murmur, and my brooks to be convex. He has also of the word *illume* made *illums*, and for the word *idiocy*, as synonymous to *idiotism*, (See Lord Bacon's authority in Johnson's folio Dictionary,) he has given *idiotcy*.

Why do you praise me for praising Miss Williams's poem on the Slave Trade? So doing, you are worse than the folk who extol Joseph's virtue, as almost super-human, because he would not be a scoundrel,—not dishonour the man who had raised him from a dungeon to wealth, and power, and happiness, and trust.

If I had not thought the work ingenious, I would have been silent as to the production of my friend, for my encomiums shall not be partial; but thinking it charming, I were despicable had I suppressed the consciousness.

> "For all that wealth, and power, and fame bestow,
> I would not be that thing, an envious woman."

On the 27th of last month I was honoured and blest by a two hours' personal conversation with the most distinguished excellence that ever walked the earth, since saints and angels left off paying us morning visits. To say that his name is Howard would be superfluous. This is the third time he has favoured me with his conversation on his way through this town. I am truly glad of our king's recovery, but yet I should not walk half so tall upon a visit from him. Mr Howard presented me with his new publication, and had previously given me the former. This is enriched

with beautiful engravings of the foreign Lazarettos. He sets out next spring, to encounter again the shafts that speed through the darkness, and "the pestilence that walketh at noon-day," stimulated by the hope of being enabled to avert, in future, some of their mischiefs from the human race.

Last Friday evening was the "Feast of Lights" with us; I assure you every window shone, many with transparent paintings, whose emblems were well imagined, while loyal enwreathed thanksgivings glowed in phosphorus. Our corporation, our esquires, our choir, and our principal tradesmen, preceded by a band of music, sung God Save the King through the streets. If our little city loved genius, science, and art, half as well as it loves its king, and his minister, our societies would be more animated than they are.

LETTER LXIII.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, April 10, 1789.

It is our fate, my dearest friend, that the wish of answering each other's letters should often and long precede our power. I hope I am not strongly tainted with the female frailty, curiosity, yet I must be interested in all that has agitated the feelings of those I love; and I thirst to know from what quarter could proceed that storm which threatened to blow your summer hopes from their cottage anchor. The harassing perplexities of which your last complains, grieved me; but I hope they are past away, without having left any nest-eggs to annoy you in future, and to vex and afflict my dear Mrs Whalley. Precious are the assurances you give me, that I possess her partial love.

I am happy in your glowing approbation of my long Horatian Paraphrase on the Pleasures of rural life. There is nobody whom my muse more ardently wishes to please than her Edwy; nor have I less pleasure in the similarity of our

tastes about Weston's beautiful sonnet to Cary and Lister, and about the sweet collection by our pensive young friend, particularly as our general ideas of sonnet-excellence do not quite coincide. That Dr Johnson should dislike the Miltonic sonnet, with its grave energies, and majestic plainness, I do not wonder. Those who, like him, hate blank-verse, are constitutionally insensible of those excellencies; but that you, whose ear is delightedly familiar with the manly melodies of blank-verse, as Mr F. Warton justly calls them, that you should not love the varying pause, undulating through the lines of the Miltonic sonnet—that you should fancy them rough breaks, astonishes me. I do not, however, despair of your conversion on this point, as I know you have a soul superior to that false shame, which annexes the idea of disgrace to changed opinions, even when their change results from the force of excellence, emerging from the mists of our accidental neglect, or hasty prejudices. The rather do I hope it, as I once held your present ideas on the nature of the sonnet, misled by the gaiety of its title. Mr Boothby, his friend Mr Tighe, Mr Dewes, and Mr Hardinge, are warm admirers of the best of Milton's sonnets; are good judges of English poetry, and masters of the Italian language. Mr Boothby and Mr Tighe

first opened my eyes, or rather put me upon attending to the peculiar excellence of the Miltonic sonnet; and I soon became of their opinion, that it formed a beautiful and distinct order of composition in our language; that dignity and energetic plainness were its most indispensable characteristics. When first Mr Boothby and Mr Tighe began my conversion, I pleaded that the very name demanded gaiety, lightness, and elegance. They urged, that nothing could be less gay than Petrarch's sonnets; reminded me, that the original meaning of the word *monody*, no more implied a funeral poem, than the title of *sonnet* seemed to call for a grave energetic picture of a single thought in fourteen lines; that great writers had a just claim to have their compositions considered as models in every style in which they have excelled; that Milton, having styled his poem, on the death of his friend, a Monody, the name has become appropriate to funeral compositions;—so also, that his sonnets have annexed an expectation of strength and majesty to that title, which, though sorrow or affectionate contemplation may soften down, the sonnet must not part with in exchange for any of the lighter graces. This was Boileau's idea concerning the nature of this order of verse. Behold a transla-

tion from a passage in him that proves it. I mean, that it should stand the first in my collection, as shewing the principles on which mine have been written. Upon your present system, the numbers will not please you. It is, however, very exactly Boileau's sense and image *.

Cary's sonnets are upon softer subjects than Milton's, and the versification is consequently and properly softer; but they are truly Miltonic, and have nothing of what you say sonnets ought to have, "the lightness of a zephyr's wing." The pause, instead of pausing at the end of the line, is often floated into the next, forming those impressive breaks, so dear to the lovers of blank-verse. The language has rather an elevated simplicity than that Popean smoothness and polish, which so highly adorn the heroic and the elegiac measure, but which I cannot think essential, or even an advantage to that of the lyric and the sonnet style. The last Gentleman's Magazine has a fine sonnet of Cary's, translated from the Italian, and a beautiful little poem upon the same subject, from Ovid. It contains also two sonnets of mine, upon which I have been highly complimented by my literary friends. They had been direfully misprinted in the General Evening Post,

* See the first sonnet in the Miscellany.—S.

but the Magazine has rectified the errors. I dare believe you will like the ideas, whatever you may think of the numbers.

My acquaintance, Mr Sargent, has lately reprinted his Mine, with two additional odes. The first, the Vision of Stone-Henge, we should think sublime, if it were possible to forget Gray's Welch Bard; but servilely imitative, yet, strikingly inferior, we are inclined to quarrel with it. The second ode, Mary Queen of Scots, has much charm for the imagination, and interest for the heart; and, though we find the author there a little too much in debt to Gray, and with high obligations to Ossian, yet has it three or four pictures as original as they are sublime.

There is fine use made of the Ossianic machinery; but you, as well as myself, will quarrel with the disingenuous note upon the very finest passage in the ode, speaking, as it does, with a degree of contempt, of the source whence the author has drawn its sublimity, and containing an insinuation against the originality of Ossian. It is impolitic, as well as disgraceful to his sensibility, which ought to furnish internal evidence of originality, powerful enough to do away all the testimony which Macpherson's disingenuous pretences have thrown into the opposite scale.

How does your beloved Mrs Jackson, whose heart is as warm as her understanding is enlarged? Has time infused its balm into those sorrows which fortitude sustained so nobly?

Adieu, Adieu!

LETTER LXIV.

Mrs Piozzi.

Lichfield, April 11, 1789.

Soon after I had the honour of addressing you last, I obtained the poem Diversity from my tardy bookseller. I confess myself to want taste for that author's general style of writing, though I admire particular passages in him extremely. By the perpetual effort and violence of his style, he loses all sight of nature, simplicity, and perspicuity, till one of his own lines in Diversity becomes his most applicable motto,

"Waging with common sense perpetual war."

Our amiable Miss W.'s poem on the Slave Trade is very dear to me. I am sure you have

attended to the happiness, beauty, and originality of its similies. Helen's genius is as soaring as her manners are gentle.

The king's recovery, preserving to us our minister, our second Daniel in talents, firmness, and integrity, was a singular mercy to the nation. Our little city made her feast of lights on the occasion, with unanimous alacrity. I marvel at the frontless effrontery with which our nominal whigs disgraced a title I ever thought so honourable, and threw away their mask of patriotism the instant the rising-sun seemed likely to ascend the zenith.

You feel, I dare say, that Dr Johnson would have been of the regent party, had he existed during the late astonishing and sudden change of ground in the parties, which, pulling different ways, make and maintain the balance of the constitution.

Another poetic publication, entitled the Loves of the Plants, has just passed the press. It is the work of one of my oldest literary friends,—a mock heroic poem, of beautiful invention, variety, and descriptive grace; with numbers even more richly harmonious than Pope's. There is a great deal of botanic science in the notes. The author is Dr Darwin, though he does not avow himself; one of Dr Johnson's blockheads, who

lived in Lichfield when Johnson told you that Lichfield had nothing for the mind. I am, with best compliments to Mr Piozzi, dear Madam, yours, &c.

LETTER LXV.

Captain Seward.

Lichfield, April 15, 1789.

I rejoice in the king's recovery. From my soul I pitied his sufferings, and the queen's affliction; but, great as is the national blessing of such a restoration, I never had an idea of writing verses on the occasion, and am sorry you have set your heart on any such matter. The Laureate must write. It is my opinion no other good poet will. The royal pair have never patronised the bards, and care little for their songs.

This period teems with poetic genius; but George the Third is no Augustus Cæsar to his Virgils, his Ovids, and his Horaces; and Mr Pitt, though a great minister, is not a Mecænas. The King of England will not resemble Alexander, in shedding the tear of envy over the tomb of Achil-

les, because no Homer threw poetic lustre over his own achievements.

Adieu, dear Sir, and believe me always yours, &c.

LETTER LXVI.

Dr Darwin.

Lichfield, May 29, 1789.

Warmly and gratefully do I thank you for your thrice valuable poetic present. If, at your bidding, I am to consider it as a return for the rhyming tributes, which I have presumed to offer you, it can be but a similar traffic to that of European merchants with Indian chiefs, in which gold and gems are given for glass-beads, and ribands.

The publication of the Botanic Garden, for which I have looked impatiently, will prove to me one of those poetic treasuries, whose resources are inexhaustible. I admire, beyond expression, the skill and happiness with which you have introduced into this work highly picturesque de-

scriptions of the mechanic construction, and process of various arts, and of the mythologic marvels best calculated to poetic purposes in almost all religions; while the landscapes are touched with the softness of Claude, or dashed with the strength and sublimity of Salvator.

The unmingled sweetness of the versification, and cloudless radiance of the style, give us music without discords, and landscapes and portraits where every part and feature is prominent and illuminated. The effect of this perpetual and unallayed brilliance, would perhaps be much too dazzling in epic, dramatic, ethic, elegiac, pastoral, or didactic poetry; in none of which ornament ought to be incessant; but its rich profusion is charming in this peculiar work, since each of its descriptions is in itself complete, and may dwell detached upon the mind. We are allowed to close the book whenever we perceive ourselves to grow dazzled by the effect of unremitted splendour; and this, without finding any injurious consequences result to the poem, by voluntary withdrawing our attention for a time; "as we shut our eyes, after a while, against eminences glittering with the sun, and turn them, aking, away upon the brown and common path-way, or upon the grass of the field."

I never read any thing more shudderingly interesting than the Poison Tree of Java. Finely do you call it "The Hydra Tree of Death."

Your notes are highly instructive and amusing even to me, an unscientific reader, respecting the study of Botany, of which I have not time to consider more than the outlines.

Most of your theories in the interludes, are as satisfactory to me, as I feel them to be ingenious; but I differ from you about the analogy between music and her sister sciences, poetry and painting. The mathematical relationship between poetic syllables and musical sounds, has little to do with their congenial powers over the human mind. The real sources of the picturesque, and the stimulative effects of musical sounds, result from the judicious intermixture of discords, hurrying and clashing in descriptive or in animating harshness. The changes into the flat keys express, according to their different combinations, grief, complaint, patience, sullenness, despair; while indignation, terror, or horror are expressed, or excited by what are called the extreme sharps. When the pleasanter keys are resumed, the mind seems relumined; and this is what professors mean when they talk of the light and shade of a concerto or a song. The soft slow tones, avoiding all violent transitions, and sliding into those agreeable changes of

key, which naturally present themselves, banish the painful sympathies, and sooth the spirits in people who, from certain corporal organization, have a native sensibility of musical combinations. Without that conformation, which enables them easily to catch and to express melodies, no strength of understanding, no philosophic research, will empower them to become acquainted with the real effects of music upon the passions. Even where this favourable conformation exists, it is yet necessary to acquire some practical knowledge of the science, at least to live in habits of attending to the ideas and feelings excited by the artful mixtures and transitions of harmony, ere we can justly appreciate its powers.

I may, without presumption, speak upon this subject, who have studied the science of music with some assiduity, nearly twenty years.

Upon Dr R. Darwin's theory, we find that there are concords and discords in colours. If I understand him right, his discovery leads him to suppose that it might be eligible, instead of listening to the Allegro and Il Penseroso, exquisitely heightened by Handel's music, to procure the professors to set the landscapes, and history groups of our best painters; that is, to compose music, which may be performed while they are exhibited, and that shall express or describe their

characteristic features. But those who have felt the enchanting result of music united, as from the earlier ages, with poetry, will never endure the divorce of this connexion, coeval with the birth of both, in favour of the third science, Painting—no, not even those who had rather see a fine picture than read a fine poem.

Allow me to confess also a little dissentient feeling upon the assertion, that poetry admits of few abstract terms. Poetry that is merely imaginative and picturesque may not. If we find few abstract terms in the Rape of the Lock, we find a profusion of them in the sublimer Essay on Man. Their nervous and condensing power seems to me peculiarly adapted to serious poetry, to that species of the art which addresses at once the understanding and the fancy. Johnson's best prose, so justly admired, strikes me as highly poetic, from his habit of using abstract expressions, which at once elevate his language, and compress his sense. He somewhere observes, "Imposition is not less frequent in the cottage of indigence, than in the mart of wealth. Truth is not greater, where elegance is less." I apprehend Addison would have expressed that observation somehow thus: "The inhabitants of cottages are as much disposed to impose and over-reach as wealthy people. Hu-

man creatures are not the more honest for being poor."

It appears to me that the Addisonian sentence, taking nothing in the abstract, could not be translated into any thing like poetry, though it might be put into rhyme—while Johnson's easily becomes ethic poetry, and would, from his pen, have been such poetry as his admirable imitation of the 10th satire of Juvenal. My hasty attempt shall not make so proud a claim,

> Disgrac'd alike by imposition's stealth,
> The cot of indigence, the mart of wealth;
> No pledge of faith can squalid garbs express,
> Truth is not more where elegance is less.

The superior facility with which verse impresses itself on the mind, in comparison with prose, makes it a better vehicle for the axioms of moral philosophy, at least according to experience, and the opinion of all former writers. Whatever is impressive, or elevated, or witty, becomes the poetic dress, though it may not be picturesque.—Instances:

> ——— "His sword the brave man draws,
> And asks no omen but his country's cause,
> May I, or noble life, or death obtain,
> Death, ill-exchang'd for bondage, or for pain."

" O let not man be proud, but firm of mind,
Bear the best humbly, and the worst resign'd."

" Passions like elements, tho' born to fight,
Yet mix'd and soften'd, in mankind unite;
The lights and shades, whose well-according strife
Make all the strength, and colour of our life."

" These gifts to man the laws of God ordain,
These gifts he grants who grants the pow'r to gain;
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find."

" What gave great Villiers to th' assassin's knife?
What fix'd disease on Harley's closing life?
What murder'd Wentworth, and what exil'd Hyde,
By king's protected, and to king's allied?
What, but their wish indulg'd, in courts to shine,
And power too great to keep or to resign?"

There is no imagery in these sentences—but surely Parnassus has its philosophers and moralists as well as its painters. The aphorisms would do in prose, but they would not so deeply impress the memory. I have obtained more clear and accurate ideas of what constitutes the beauty of rural scenery, from Mason's English Garden, than any prose tract could have given me. And Akenside, our mutual favourite—you will recollect that his poetry is professedly philosophic. Resting my defence of philosophy and science, as proper sub-

jects for poetry, under the shadow of his ample and splendid wing, I remain, dear Sir, your's sincerely.

LETTER LXVII.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 3, 1789.

THANK you for gratifying my curiosity concerning the circumstances of a connection formed by a charming young lady, so near, and so dear to yourself. The bride and groom were so good as to call upon me in their road through Lichfield to Hagley. It gives me pleasure to find that your new nephew is the brother of one of the most engaging men I know. With Mr George Waddington I passed two months, in the summer 1777, beneath the hospitable roof of very old friends of mine, in Yorkshire, to whose eldest son he was then private tutor. You will find him learned and ingenious; the erudition of colleges, with the politeness of courts—at least, such he then was—or such I fancied him—but years, as they pass, sometimes shed rust upon graces; and

friendship, with people of warm imagination, even more frequently turns upon pleasing qualities the magnifying end of the telescope.

At length D.'s brilliant poem, the Botanic Garden, appears, enriched with extraneous imagery, allusion, scenery, and description from the mechanism of various arts, and the marvels of various mythology. The *simplex munditiis* of writing, which at times so well becomes the poet, might certainly be better spared in this peculiar work, than from any other imaginable theme; but were he to give us an epic, a narrative, or ethic poem, and his genius is questionless equal to any species of poetic composition, I apprehend his maxim, that every thing in poetry should be picture, would lead him to overcharge, even such a composition, with a profusion of high-wrought ornament.

Mrs Smith had a very good concert—her room was full—her friends were generous—and I never heard her voice in so much power. The music and songs were admirably selected, and seemed to please extremely. I wish you could have added to your bounty to her, the delight of your encouraging smile.

Thus far was written on Friday evening—unwilling to lose the entire benefit of its fast-fading sun-beams, I walked out, and found, on my re-

turn, the illustrious, the graceful Hayley, in my dressing-room. He is going to Rome, and the rest of the Italian cities—had been at Derby, to settle Mrs Hayley in lodgings there, during his absence, near her friend, Mrs Berridge. He circled round by Lichfield to take his leave of myself, and of his friend Mr Saville, who was unfortunately at Birmingham. He said indispensable business called him immediately to town, and he set out the next morning. I travelled with him to Coleshill. He looks vastly well, but I dread the influence of sultry climates on an habit so feverish. The nonsense and malice of the public critics, seem to have given him the same disgust to the idea of publishing, that sickens upon my spirit, and slackens all my nerves of poetic industry.

LETTER LXVIII.

DR DARWIN.

Lichfield, May 22, 1789.

I AM again obliged by your attention to me, in replying so soon to my observations on your

thrice-charming work—but as I find that the language in which I expressed them, did not make their meaning quite clear to you, I intrude upon you once more to explain them a little further.

By words expressive of abstract ideas, I thought you meant terms that signify, according to Johnson's definition, "the mode or quality of a being, without any regard to the subject in which it exists, as grace, awkwardness, magnitude, diminution, complacence, sullenness," &c. It appears to me that words thus expressive of properties in the aggregate, are as freely used in ethic, metaphysic, or didactic poetry, as in prose.

> "Remembrance and reflection, how allied!
> What thin partitions sense from thought divide!"

If in the sentence, quoted in my last from Johnson, Indigence is personified by her cottage, and Wealth by her mart, imposition, truth, and elegance, are merely used as abstract terms. You surprise me by calling that sentence bombast as prose. I see not that the two personifications have there a more bombastic effect; than when, instead of saying, "such and such effects result from electrical experiments," you would say, "electricity produces such and such effects."

Johnson appears to me to have been the first

introducer of that style in prose, which expresses much in little, by using the abstract term frequently, instead of characterizing an individual or individuals, by his or their peculiar disposition; as "Indolence reposes," instead of "the indolent man reposes;" "Criticism pronounces," instead of "critics pronounce," &c.

It must certainly be allowed, that these are personifications; and that, by their perpetual recurrence, the style approaches nearer to poetry; but so long as it becomes more nervous and condensed, instead of more diffuse by the habit, surely its excellence is increased, provided care be taken, which Johnson always took, that it shall not run into blank verse; which, except as quotation, has always bad effect in prose. Our historians, our philosophers, our orators, have all adopted this habit, and I confess I like the strength and majesty it gives to their language. Written language ought surely to be more elevated than that of conversation; and what might wear too pompous an air from the lip, becomes the superior dignity of the pen;—yet Johnson talked thus, and awed the world. He would probably, however, have been ridiculed instead of admired on that account, but for those prompt and cutting sarcasms with which he always avenged the presumption of raillery, and the coldness of inattention.

The quotations I made in my last from Pope and Johnson, were not designed as instances of the use of abstract terms in poetry, but given in support of my opinion, that there is often very fine poetry without imagery. You observe, that "his sword the brave man draws," is picture. I grant it; but the next line, more excellent in the elevation of the sentiment, is not; neither is there any thing picturesque in that fine metaphysical passage, beginning, "Passions like elements;" nor in the equally fine moral ones from Johnson, "What gave great Villiers," &c.—and "These gifts to man," &c. I contended for the use and beauty of poetic aphorisms, from the force with which they fix themselves on the memory.

Nothing was ever less meant by me than to maintain that the natural sensibility of melody which, in different people, varies so extremely in degree, and in some exists not at all, results from superior quickness in the simple faculty of hearing. Neither my own mother, or either of her sisters, could, in the least degree, distinguish one tune from another; not even if an instrument was playing the loyal song, without a voice, could they guess that it was "God save the King;"—yet were they the daughters of a man who amused his leisure hours with music, sung well, and played tolerably on the bass-viol. He had a master to

teach them all, in turn, to play on the spinnet. The effort was fruitless, Nature had denied the capacity:—yet, fond of poetry, they were all distinguished for reading and repeating verses with sweet and varied cadence; nor was there ever the least defect in their hearing, so far as it extended to speaking, and perceiving noises of every kind, without the pale of musical combination.

When we compare these not unfrequent instances, with that prevailing innate sensibility which enables infants to express various tunes before they can speak, it is surely in vain to deny its strength and variation, as an instinctive propensity.

It is the same with painting; the great Opie was bred up in common day-labour, amidst the mines of Cornwall, yet produced wonders with his pencil, which induced Peter Pindar, in reality Dr Woolcot, to entice him to London. The Doctor told me that he found Opie without any other powers of mind above those of his fellow-labourers in the tin-mines; and that he continued dull and unapprehensive upon every subject except that of painting. When nature gives to a human being that strong propensity to some one art or science, which produces a Colossus in that line, his other faculties are not always proportionally strong. Poetry, indeed, seems to have this superiority over

painting and music, that, while we sometimes see a stupid man a fine performer on instruments, or a fine painter, we never see him a fine poet. We may venture to believe, that Sir Isaac Newton would not have shone as a musician, a painter, or a poet; and we know that Handel's father, who professed medicine, terrified by the propensity which enabled his son to play beautiful voluntaries at five years old, without knowing a note of music, forcibly excluded him from access to instruments and musical society during a year or two; that he had at length the good sense to withdraw this restraint, upon the remonstrance of a friend: "Your son will disgrace you as a physician, a lawyer, a divine; but he will probably acquire distinguished fame as a musician, if you indulge and cultivate his native bias."

My dear lost Honora had a natural bent to mathematical researches, and mechanic inventions; and, though educated with versifiers, did not write verses; but I well remember when you brought us some mathematical problems to consider, she imbibed your instructions with eager pleasure, while I grew absent and weary of the subject.

Gray detested metaphysic and mathematic studies, and conversation; and humorously tells us, in his letters published by Mason, "As for me

taphysics, I am no cat, I cannot see in the dark; and as for mathematics, I am no eagle, I cannot see in too much light."

It is in defence of the existence of inherent inclinations, and of the wisdom which directs them in various beings, to various objects, that I have cited these instances, since, on the subject of music, your last seems to doubt their existence.

Our young bards, Cary and Lister, Mr White and Mr Saville, continue to explore with me the poetic graces of the Botanic Garden, with delight "which grows by what it feeds upon." I had great pleasure on Wednesday, in conversing with the ingenious and generous Dr R. Darwin. We walked together to the blooming valley which you gave to beauty, and intended giving to science. Though the traces of the latter are fading fast away, the glow of the former is yet vivid, "and breathes of *you*."

LETTER LXIX.

Henry Cary, Esq.

Lichfield, May 29, 1789.

Needless, I trust, is your apprehension, that Lister slackens in his allegiance to the muses In the, of late, seldom times that we have conversed together, without the restraining presence of uncongenial spirits, I have perceived no bluntness in the edge of his poetic enthusiasm; and he lately sent me a charming Miltonic sonnet on the hard and penurious lot of the untaught genius, Hamilton Reid.

The beauty of your sonnet on Mr Hayley's excursion to Italy is considerable. If it possessed the, in my opinion, essential characteristic of a legitimate sonnet, the Miltonic pauses, I should consider it as one of the most perfect compositions I know in that order of verse. Hope it will appear in the next Gentleman's Magazine.

Upon the design you expressed of writing a didactic epistle to young poets, I am going to speak to you with the freedom of friendship. Recollect that the subject has been exhausted by

Mr Hayley, in his great, his not-to-be-excelled work, the Epistles on Epic Poetry.

If a great writer has taken a theme, and fallen below himself in the execution; if he has neglected to give it those advantages, of which it seems to us capable, then let us not be discouraged by any splendour of name or reputation, in the probable hope of soaring above him where he has failed to rise the height that we think attainable; but if, on the contrary, we feel that he has treated the subject in the best-possible manner, so as to render hopeless every attempt to excel him, then let us, above all other poetic errors, avoid taking a theme so pre-occupied; for if it has already received every necessary justice, and every requisite ornament; if it is already in possession of the public attention, it is in vain that we might even treat it *equally* well. We must *excel* the established work, or inevitable neglect will be the barren recompense of our labour. Besides, the attempt will always be construed into proof, that we think we have excelled the writer whose subject we chose to discuss over again; and if the world should think otherwise, it will despise our presumption. This was the rock upon which Pope split, when he gave our nation an ode upon a subject which had been so felicitously hit off by Dryden. I must ever think that, but for that

luckless and ill-judged attempt, no person of any taste for the true excellence of our art, would have hesitated a moment to pronounce Pope a greater poet than Dryden. I believe also, that Milton, whose superiority to Dryden none deny, would have failed to rival the Ode on St Cecilia's day, had he contested the theme,—so that Pope's inferiority on that one subject ought not to be brought, though it so often is brought, as a proof of a genius inferior to Dryden's. I am sure his Eloisa to Abelard excels every epistle of Dryden's, in a greater degree than Dryden's Ode excels his. Addison was guilty of the same folly in attempting to rival Pope's splendid translation, and he added despicable meanness to that folly, when he made Tickel father his translation, for the purpose of deciding publicly in its favour against that of Pope,—an attempt which met the disgrace it deserved. An open, ingenuous contest, had been only presumption; but his conduct in that affair was too base for the practice of a noble mind, and would amply have justified satire far more rough and indignant than it received from the bard he had injured.

Shenstone committed an error of judgment, though not of heart, when he employed his muse upon the Choice of Hercules; already enriched and adorned to the utmost by the imagination of

Lowth, whose beautiful Spenceric ode on that fable is one of the brightest stars in Dodsley's Galaxy.

As to P.'s ode to Howard, it is veritable the clown tumbling after harlequin; with an infinitely greater inferiority to Hayley's, than Pope's ode is inferior to Dryden's; than Addison's translation of the first book of Homer to Pope's; than Shenstone's allegory to Lowth's.

With taste and sensibility like yours, very warm admiration of Rousseau is inevitable; but I am sorry to see you so dazzled by the splendours of his eloquence, as not to perceive that little sound morality is to be found amidst his glittering maze of paradoxes. Remember, my dear Cary, the distrust, misanthropy, and wretchedness into which his subtle refinements betrayed his own spirit, and beware of adopting them with too implicit veneration!

I read his Emile some twenty years ago. As every thing from his pen must be exquisitely ingenious, I would reperuse it if I had leisure to read for amusement merely, or if I were likely to be engaged in the education of youth; since, however wild, impracticable, and absurd it must be to reduce his entire system to practice, many useful hints may doubtless be taken from it. I wish that you would put the volume in your pocket

that contains the Savoyard curate's confession of faith, when next you come to Lichfield.

You make me long to re-examine that, for its traces are almost wholly faded away from my memory. Adieu!

LETTER LXX.

MRS COTTON.

Lichfield, June 15, 1789.

MY dear Mrs C., your friend, Mr Jerningham, honours me in the poetic present he sends. It consists of his last publication, Enthusiasm, and a smaller poem which passed the press in 1786—originally written in the Album, at his brother's seat in Norfolk. It contains characters of highly tinted panegyric on the present Lady Jerningham, and on his mother, the late Lady; and it breathes a tender and agreeable spirit of local partiality. This gentleman is a very pleasing writer; a feeling heart, and an elegant imagination, seem to preside, with united influence, over his pen. Hence it is, that he succeeds much best in pathetic subjects. There are fine passages in the Enthusiasm;

but it is not so dear and interesting to me as some of his other poems.

At length our brilliant Mrs Knowles takes an house in Lombard Street again—a strange situation for such a spirit to choose, when city closeness, city noise, and city dirt are no longer to produce pecuniary advantages—but its vicinity to the counting-house in which, with all her ample fortune, she has placed her son, is the reason she alleges for this choice.

Mrs Smith's voice strengthened considerably amidst the exercise given it at the Shrewsbury, Lichfield, and Birmingham concerts. I suppose they were all, like our own, very charming—they must be when graced with two such singers as Mr Saville and his daughter. His voice is still in undiminished power. The grace and energy of his manner were not likely to suffer by the elapse of years. Mrs Smith's voice, gaining strength, is very promising; its smooth, round, and even sweetness, is confessedly unmatched, even by the most celebrated of our public singers; loudness and courage are all she wants;

> "All that impedes her in the golden round
> Of fame, and fortune."

The gentlemen and ladies of Shrewsbury made

Mrs Smith a benefit concert in the winter. It was brilliant by their number and elegance, profitable by their generosity, and encouraging by their kindness. None can better deserve than her excellent father, and her gentle self, such liberal patronage.

Adieu, my dear friend! Yours.

LETTER LXXI.

THEOPHILUS SWIFT, ESQ.

Lichfield, July 9, 1789.

DEAR Sir,—A very troublesome and alarming shortness of breath, to which the stooping posture of the writing-desk is decidedly pernicious, has induced me to delay replying to the letters of all my correspondents much longer than I wished, else had you received my earlier acknowledgments for your gay and spirited poem, The Female Parliament.

My silence was oppressive to me, when I believed you in health; but now that your duel with Colonel Lenox has thrown you on the couch of pain, though, I trust, not of danger, there is no

enduring the consciousness of any thing which may look like the coldness of neglect!—This terribly fashionable arbitration of disputes!—Alas, how pregnant is it with apprehension, regret, and misery to relations and to friends!—but it is in vain to lament, to moralize upon the subject.

I have expressed to you my perfect conviction, resulting from having long considered the subject, that the exclusion of the imperfect rhyme must be an inevitable and great disadvantage to any poetic writer. You must be sensible that all our best poets, except Hayley, both of the past and the present age, retain it. The judicious, and not too licentious mixture, relieves my ear, instead of jarring upon it; producing a spirit and grandeur of sound, unknown to the unvaried and cloying sweetness of the always-perfect jingle.

You avowed yourself under the influence of a contrary prejudice, beneath which the variety and elevation of Mr Hayley's numbers have, as I at least fancy I can discern, suffered diminution. Therefore is it that I exult to find you, in this poem, getting loose from these self-imposed fetters.

It is flattering to find our sentiments upon any subject in unison with theirs whose abilities we respect. Before I received your last, I had expressed to Miss Williams all you expressed to me concerning her poem on the Slave Trade; the

pleasure its many excellencies afforded me; its pathos; its accuracy; the high degree of genius shining out in its original and happy similies; my wonder at a choice of measure, which appeared to me the most unfavourable that could have been selected for a subject of that nature. I have heard from her since, but she takes no notice of my objection. In one respect this dear glowing daughter of Apollo is an uncomfortable correspondent. She writes to me in turn, but she does not answer my letters. I could not do thus to a friend, unless I felt a pretty sovereign contempt for their abilities and opinions.

You and I agree perfectly about the genius and grace of Helen's compositions. I forget if I ever spoke to you about Mrs C. Smith's everlasting lamentables, which she calls sonnets, made up of hackneyed scraps of dismality, with which her memory furnished her from our various poets. Never were poetical whipt syllabubs, in black glasses, so eagerly swallowed by the odd taste of the public.

I have begun Mrs Piozzi's Travels, and though not yet reached the middle of the first volume, have already met with several interesting, amusing, and ingenious observations; but I feel astonished and disgusted at the corruption of her style, loaded with idioms, and, as her Johnson used to

call them, colloquial barbarisms of every kind, to which the Johnsonian Latinisms, and display of classic learning are extremely heterogeneous:—Adieu.

LETTER LXXII.

REV. HERBERT CROFT.

Lichfield, July 10, 1789.

SIR—I was much amused with your very ingenious and witty letter, which I received from Mr Hardinge. I do not wonder that you think his having thrown aside my packets to you, (which I desired him to frank and forward,) as useless things, not worth either your attention or his, an omission that is but similar to that of not counting over soiled linen before it goes to the washwoman; and, as such, to be laught off, and thought of no more.

I am not vain enough to fancy, that Mr Hardinge's gay contempt of any little exertions of mine, is the least degradation to his virtues or his genius; and, I am sure, the proofs he has given me of that contempt, however they may mortify

my self-consequence, will never induce me to endeavour, for a single moment, to depreciate their excellence; but his unpoliteness has given a certain jar to my feelings, that renders it irksome to me to write to him. My correspondence was, considering the scantiness of my leisure, distressingly extended when he sought me first; and, though I told him so, he continued to employ me perpetually in sending him copies after copies of all the verses with which, from time to time, he favoured me; the cry was still, "I have mislaid the last transcript you sent me of my ode, or my sonnet,—pray indulge me with another?" and, at last, after having repeatedly sent him copies of every individual effusion of his muse, he coolly desired me to get a little book and copy them all into that, as he had mislaid a number of the single transcripts; he made this modest request just as I had discovered that he had not chosen to take the trouble for me, of directing and forwarding three packets to Oxford, which had cost me all the leisure I could command during several weeks; and upon my resenting it, turned that resentment into every sort of ridicule. After such treatment, I can no longer write to Mr Hardinge with pleasure. It is necessary to my health to abridge my correspondence; and it is but fair to

strike those from my list who have shewn the least value for what I write. Lavater has justly observed, that there is no disgrace in being once used impolitely, but it is consummate weakness voluntarily to subject ourselves to the repetition of contumelious neglect; and yet Mr Hardinge knows that this is not the first instance he has shewn of marked inattention to my requests.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant.

LETTER LXXIII.

Court Dewes, Esq.

Lichfield, July 20, 1789.

Indeed, my dear ingenious friend, just and excellent as you are, it seems to me utterly incomprehensible that you, who have been contemporary with Gray, Collins, Mason, Akenside, Hayley, the two Wartons, Goldsmith, Johnson, Churchill, Shenstone, Beattie, Langhorne, Anstey, Cowper, Jephson, Sargent, Crowe, and that first of poetic painters, Darwin; with those miracles of unassisted genius, Chatterton and Burns,—that

you should fancy the light of poetry, in the period which has produced them, but as the faint reflux of the lunar effulgence, borrowed from the set suns which lighted the reigns of William, Anne, and George the First.

O thou, in this instance, twin spirit of Shaftesbury, who made those suns in *thy* consideration into moons, nay moons enveloped in mists; what spell is it that so fascinated him, and which so fascinates thee, and made you both talk of diminished strength and faded fires?—he in the period you now exalt, and you in one yet more distinguished by the light of genius?

— — — — — —

I lately received a new proof of the progress made in the poetic art since Dryden's time. Till last winter, I never happened to meet with Denham's Cowper's Hill, which Pope so highly praised. His praises have been echoed by so many writers since, that I took the merit of that poem upon trust, admired the lines upon the Thames, so often quoted, and reckoned upon the pleasure I should have in reading it, when chance might throw it in my way. But I was amazed when I read it, for the Thames lines appeared to me as almost the only good lines in the composition. Stiff inharmonious numbers; forced thoughts; indistinct landscape; moral reflections

trite and not naturally arising from the subject. I read Crowe's Lewesdon Hill with it, and exulted in the superiority of the modern.

By the way, those justly admired lines upon the Thames, are but a sort of parody of a passage in an old English poet, many years prior to the birth of Cowper's Hill,—T. Cartwright's panegyric upon Ben Johnson, published in 1651. Behold them,

> " Low without creeping, high without strain'd wing,
> Smooth, yet not weak, and, by a thorough care,
> Big without swelling, without painting fair."

Your sentiments of Mrs P——'s travels are mine, —admirable matter, in, as it should seem, chosen meanness of language. We can never enough wonder that she should choose to fill her lamp of knowledge, wit, and information, with train-oil in general, since she supplies it, at intervals, with that of cloves and cinnamon.—Adieu.

LETTER LXXIV.

Miss Williams.

Lichfield, July 23, 1789.

My dear Miss Williams,—I hope nothing will prevent the *partie quarré* from realizing the kind purpose of their expedition to Lichfield, so flattering to my wishes. Tell Miss Mathias how much she obliges me by her design of joining it; and that I trust her brother will make up the *quintetto.*

With the most pleasurable eagerness have I explored the pages of Dr Moore's admirable work. The objection which I have seen some people make to it from the press, and in private letters, appears to me unmeaning. Those who blame Dr M. for making his leading character a villain, must quarrel with Shakespeare for his Macbeth and Richard the Third, and with Richardson for his Lovelace; but, in all the four instances, the light of morality breaks with stronger power from beneath the dark shades of their vices, than it could have done from the virtues of one of those pattern heroes with which fiction abounds.

I should be more inclined to think the digressive histories of so many personages an objection, who have little connection with the principals; they too frequently force the mind into new channels, while it is ardent to pursue those which conduct it through the feelings and fortunes of the capital characters.

I have mentioned to you how delighted, how fascinated, I was with Mrs Piozzi's conversation. Her Anecdotes of Johnson, though animated and amusing, did not, by any means, appear to me on a level with those colloquial attractions; but with her letters in the Johnsonian Collection I was much pleased. To her Travels through Italy I sat down with avidity; with every presentiment in their favour that personal friendship, and the extreme pleasure you and Sophia expressed in them, could inspire; but never was I more surprised than to meet, from Mrs Piozzi's pen, a style perplexed with the most incorrect obscurities of expressions, loaded with idioms, debased by vulgarnesses, and by chamber-maid flippancy; such as—"it is the Gondoleri sure enough;"—"beat," for exceed;—"near hand," for near;—"too," for also; "by now," for by this time;—"let slip," for omit;—"tried at him," for attempted to persuade him;—"another guess man," for another sort of man;—"comicalest," and "beauti-

fulest," for most comical and most beautiful: with a countless number of similar vulgarisms, of most ungentlewoman-like choice, and most unscholar-like frequency. When a Cheapside miss exclaims, "O! he is the beautifulest man!" we smile and pity her want of education; but how can we suppress our indignation when genius, travelled knowledge, classic erudition, brilliant wit, and Johnsonian pupilage, thus disgrace themselves! It seems an insult upon her readers, whom she often convinces of her ample power to have made the style as polished as the matter is interesting; since she often interweaves passages that are very finely written. What can she mean by the silly exclamation, so often intruding into the midst of her sentences, "in good time?" Some cant phrase, I suppose, at which we should stare a little amid the slip-shod privileges of confidential conversation.

With the never-ending profusion of kitchen-phraseology, we find stiff Latinisms, out of all common use, even with learned authors—and they agree as ill with the former, as the late fat Duchess of Northumberland's heavy diamond ear-rings, trailing, as I remember to have seen them, when I was a girl, from her long ears, and short neck upon a dirty and coarse muslin handkerchief.

With this miracle in literature, we have a miracle in morals more lamentable in the flight of Mrs —— with Mr ——. Of the lady there are a thousand amiable and generous acts upon record, previous to this her fatal frailty; and her lover always seemed one of those undeviating sons of propriety, whose subjected temperament placed him

"Out of the shot and danger of desire."

For the —— family, belonging to this place, the torch of love seems to burn with the fire of Eblis. You understand my allusion, since you have, doubtless, read the Caliph Vathec, that admirable sport of an imagination, at once witty and sublime;—in whose solemn close, we find a new-created region of demonism, the sublimity of which Milton himself has not excelled.

What a struggle in France!—while we lament the blood with which it streams, we revere the motives that have opened those vital sluices. O! that oppression and unjust bonds were banished from every government!

You were questionless enchanted with that fine ode of Mr Sargent's, Mary Queen of Scotland,—the bright reverse of Mr St John's dull unpoetic

play on that ever-interesting theme;—a play which the reviewers stupidly alleged to be an imitation of Shakespeare, though there is scarce a metaphor through its pages, and Shakespeare has not three lines without one. But for the ode, whatever may be its obligations to Gray for the prophetic plan, there is great originality in some of the portraits—that of Cromwell has no superior; and, upon the whole, what striking, what mournful grace! what spirited transitions!

Mr S., honoured by your remembrance, desires to return his compliments, and that I should express the pleasure he feels in the idea of soon conversing with you again. I regret that the sweet syren, his daughter, will not have the happiness of being introduced to you, and of varying the pleasures of our party by her melting songs. She is going to Bath to practise Italian singing again with Mr Rauzini.

Adieu. Yours faithfully.

LETTER LXXV.

Mrs Knowles.

Lichfield, July 25, 1789.

If my purposes and my leisure had not been torn this way and that, from day to day, so many weeks had not elapsed without my acknowledging your charming letter—nor have I been well lately; oppressed respiration, the consequence of too much writing; and yet many whom I love, with the *muse*, are neglected—these are the mischiefs of extended connections.

My poor father is yet spared to me, though so nearly lost to myself. His convulsive seizures are, however, more frequent, and, alas! he had one last night; but Dr Jones thought the present danger again blown over. I pray God send he may not be mistaken.

So France has dipt her lilies in the living streams of American freedom, and bids her sons be slaves no longer. In such a contest, the vital sluices must be wastefully opened—but few English hearts, I hope, there are, that do not wish vic-

tory may sit upon the swords that freedom has unsheathed.

This is the era of miracles—Frenchmen fight for liberty!—apathists elope!—and Mrs Piozzi publishes her travels in a slovenly style, which would disgrace a school-girl, where language like the following, debases almost every page. "It was equally their wonder how his Holiness went walking about with a book in his hand"—and "the King of Naples told them they might do their own way, and he would do his." In short, she has given the exact character of her own work, when speaking of that of another person. She says, "every page has corruption, barbarism, and vulgarity." With these are intermingled strange break-teeth Latinisms, so little in common use, even with her Johnson, that a well-informed woman, however extensive her reading in her own language, not knowing the dead ones, will at once find these volumes too pedantic at times for her comprehension, and perpetually too vulgar for her unindignant endurance; and, O! what a Midas-like decision do they contain upon poetry, when they pronounce the pre-eminence of Merry's Russian Daughter over all other poetry! With these scarlet sins against good taste in composition, yet genius, wit, and good sense, and often very finely written passages, emerge from

amidst the chaos, and make amusement and interest keep pace with indignant wonder.

Mrs Hunter is very good to inquire after me and my pursuits; but they, alas! are forced into most unliterary channels—and you, my friend, are very good to tell me I shall be welcome to your habitation in town. Many kind friends invite me thither—but there is no looking towards the capiltal while my dear infirm father stands so much in need of my tenderness and nursing care—and when I lose him, I think I shall lose all spirits to encounter the inevitable hurries of such an expedition—of stepping into the vortex of my connections there.

Ah! my poor father has had another fit, though a slight one; yet, from its never happening before without an interval of some weeks, it alarms me extremely.

I am flattered that my sonnets pleased your Telemachus; yet, O my dear Mrs Knowles! in hours of heart-sick anxiety, such as now roll heavily over my head, dull grows the ear to the voice of praise. Adieu!

LETTER LXXVI.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, April 7, 1789.

You were very good to prevent the alarm and uneasiness I must have suffered from dubious and exaggerated reports of an accident so dreadful. Thank Heaven I can now mix congratulations with the sympathy that looks back upon dear Mrs Whalley's danger and sufferings *. I look forward to the, I hope, near approach of that period, in which recovered health and strength shall retain no vestige of the injury. I am sure you will transmit, as soon as it shall be in your power, intelligence so welcome. O! my friend, when you saw Mrs Whalley lying stunned and motionless in the bottom of the water, what an instant of horror and agony for an heart like yours! Its impression can never be effaced; but it will serve to render more dear and precious the consciousness of restored tranquillity, when reason and recollection shall give it back to your spirit. Though

* An overturn in a whisky from an high bank into a deep brook.

still suffering, yet those sufferings are no longer violent, and the gentle invalid has friends by her couch, whose every look will heighten to her heart the value of that existence, the loss of which she has so narrowly escaped.

I had a long letter from Sophia lately, after a silence of many months—and for which she confesses that I am indebted to your solicitations. The epistle, with whatever reluctance it might be commenced, flows with the wonted graceful ease of her pen, and sparkles with all the fires of her spirit. It speaks of a plan in agitation to visit me, accompanied by Helen Williams, the poetic; Albinia Mathias, the musical; and Miss Maylin, the beauteous. Amiable Miss Mathias has a brother of very distinguished talents who, I hope, will escort them.

As to sonnets—I wonder that you should term the breaks, in various parts of the lines, instead of carrying on the sense to the end of the line, breaks which constitute all the grace and beauty of blank verse, "discord for discord's sake," in the sonnet. Mine is not an ear that could like discord for discord's sake any more than yours. The varied pause seems to me equally a characteristic beauty in the sonnet as in blank verse.

It does not surprise me that you should dislike several of Milton's sonnets, since several of them

are certainly at once hard and quaint; but it is indeed surprising that, after having studied those compositions, you should not acknowledge, that a few of them are the best-possible models for that order of verse, equally proper to convey elevated sentiments with majestic simplicity, and domestic feelings with energetic tenderness.

National jealousy, and the prudery of French taste in poetry, too often made Boileau unjust to the excellencies of Milton's compositions for us to believe he meant to exalt that author, when he declared the constituent excellence of the sonnet to be grave and simple energy, which we find carried to its last perfection in a few of Milton's.

I never heard Mr Hayley speak upon this subject; but think it probable he may have imbibed some of your prejudices, since his own sonnets, beautiful in every other respect, want the characteristic grace of the legitimate sonnet, the floating pause.

Why a composition ought not to be energetic, because it is short, I confess I cannot see; and, therefore, though I am aware of the ingenuity, I cannot perceive the justice of your simile of the oak-leaved myrtle for the Miltonic sonnet. I should rather apply to Milton, contemplating the best of his, Mr Hayley's charming compliment to Miers, on his miniature pictures:

" Thy magic pencil, in its narrow space,
Pours the full portion of uninjur'd grace."

No Italian poet should, perhaps, be the model for an English one in any line. Where Milton imitates Petrarch, his sonnets are the worse for it, as quaint turns and conceits are below the dignity of the British rhythm. Those which you call the least exceptionable, do not appear to me the best. The sonnet to the Nightingale, and that to Mrs Thompson, though they want not beauty, are by no means amongst those which strike me as models. Desiring the nightingale to sing before the cuckoo, as a good omen to his love, is a quaint idea. Faith and love, clad over with purple beams, and flying up to heaven as harbingers of Mrs Thompson's soul, is quite a Petrarchian affectation, in which there is more fantastic prettiness than genuine beauty. Those which should, I think, be kept in view by sonnet writers, as the painters of ideal beauty keep the Phidian statues in their galleries, are—that To the Soldier to spare his dwelling-place—the second to Cyriac Skinner, on his own blindness—that On the Piedmont Massacre—the sublime one to Oliver Cromwell, as far as the middle of the ninth line,—for the remainder is worthless, the conclusion coarse

and wretched—that, which you like, to his Deceased Wife.

These are perfect models for the grave, elevated sonnet; while the dearest of them all—To Mr Laurence, leaves, for the domestic sonnet, only an hope to emulate its interesting sensibility, its striking pictures, its simple excellence, but never to rival, never to excel it.

Laurence, of virtuous father virtuous son,
Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
Help waste a sullen day? what may be won
From the hard season gaining.—Time will run
On smoother, till Favonius re-inspire
The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
The lily and rose, that neither sow'd nor spun.
What neat repast shall feast us, light, and choice,
Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
To hear the lute well touch'd, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes, and Tuscan air?
He, who of these delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

With what tender pensive grace is that picture of the gloomy season, in the opening, brought to the eye!—and how deliciously is that season exhilarated by the social comforts and scientific elegancies proposed as its softeners, in the latter part! Upon a superficial view, the closing coup-

let appears strange; but, in reality, it unexpectedly conveys a truly wise and philosophic insinuation upon the impolicy of growing too familiar with even the most refined amusements. Mason has expanded this idea in Elfrida:

> "The youth who bathes in Pleasure's limpid stream
> At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his soul
> Nerv'd with recruited strength;—but if too oft
> He swims, in sportive mazes, through the flood,
> It chills his languid virtue."

The remaining number of Milton's sonnets, compared to those above mentioned, are as his Paradise Regained to his Paradise Lost, the same spirit sometimes breaking out, but the general texture either harsh or languid.

I did not surely say that I had ever disliked all Milton's sonnets, only that I had not attended to their merits, under a mistaken idea, that sonnets should be either amorous or gay. The excellence of Milton's is certainly neither dazzling nor obtrusive, but coy and intrinsic—may, therefore, be hastily overlooked by people who taste poetry, and must inevitably be "caviare to the multitude."

I do not understand what you mean by "quaint stiffness;" if you intend to observe that it may be found in Cary's poems. As to their being

imitative, I think nothing can well be less imitative. Every young poet must form his manner in some school. His odes are of Gray's, his sonnets of Milton's, but softer; and there are no stolen ideas, no servile imitations, to be found in either them, or in the lyric compositions.

I do not think it fair to appeal to Johnson's critical tribunal for arbitration on any poetic subject, except indeed his dictionary, which, for verbal authority, may generally be relied upon. In his critical dissertations, the Lives of the Poets, he is too perpetually stimulated by rival-hating envy, to perplex and mislead concerning the true merits of the art, and the respective claims of the artists, to have his decisions referred to in disputes of this nature. You observe "that, having never written sonnets, he could have no bias upon his judgment from jealousy." Now Johnson has not attempted Pindaric odes any more than sonnets; it may, therefore, with equal force, be alleged, that, no clashing interest existing, we may rely upon his judgment, as inevitably impartial, when he decides upon their claims. Yet how unjust, how despicable is his wretched contempt of Gray's noble odes! Remember, also, his contempt for the sweet, the matchless Lycidas of our immortal Bard; and, I am sure, you will confess that, either a wretched depravity of taste, or

a lying spirit of criticism, incapacitates his dogmas for becoming umpires between literary friends, when they differ about any thing Milton has written. He decide, indeed! who asserts in his life of that poet, that nobody closes the leaves of the Paradise Lost with any wish of ever opening them again!!! Surely it is strange that you should say of *him*, who could *so* say, that "Milton has, on the whole, had due honour from Johnson." To me it appears, that whatever praise he gives Milton, was for the purpose of giving an air of impartiality to his injustice, and keener edge to his sarcasms. But that his malice to Milton is so glaring, he might have a better right than yourself to dislike the sonnets of that poet, since his hatred to blank verse was allowed, and since they partake so much of its nature. That my opinions do not blindly follow the whistling of a great name, my confession that I cannot read a canto of Spenser without weariness may evince.

Adieu! my dear friend. I hope a few poetical dissentions may constitute the sum total of our disputes; and that excellent Mrs Whalley's recovery will shortly be perfect!

LETTER LXXVII.

H. Repton, Esq.

Lichfield, July 15, 1789.

Oppressed respiration, my ingenious friend, produced by the sedentary employment of a too extensive correspondence, obliges me to submit to an epistolary regimen. It has many mortifications; not having earlier made my acknowledgments for your last is of the number.

Much, indeed, should I have liked making a *trio* with you and Mr Knight, in exploring the labyrinths of Hainault Forest. Emes made the same declaration about being indebted to our Needwood for lessons in the elements of picturesque gardening, which Brown avowed concerning that of Hainault. Emes laid out Beaudesert*, which is on the edge of Needwood, very finely; and is thus complimented upon the subject by Mundy, in his beautiful poem which celebrates and bears the name of our forest:

* The seat of Lord Uxbridge.

" Emes who yon desert wild explor'd,
And to its name the scene restor'd,
Here, fir'd by native beauty, trac'd
The footsteps of the Goddess Taste;
Won from her coy retreats, she came,
And led him up these paths to fame."—

But if you do not transcend your predecessors in the art* you have adopted, it will be strange. You, whom poetry and painting have so much more bounteously endowed. Surely the best initiated in their mysteries, must be best qualified to make English nature dance her minuet de-les-Arcades with the most consummate grace. I am happy to find the engagements of your new profession likely to lead you our way before this sullen and watery summer resigns the name she disgraces.

It delights me to glide into the Shakespeare Gallery on the wings of your Bee†, that, with so much industry and skill, collects the honey of genius from every separate effort in that art, which is now exerting all its powers in honour of our immortal bard. This little tract breathes the true spirit of criticism; not blind to the defects

* Landscape-gardening.

† A critical tract on the Shakespeare Gallery by this gentleman, entitled the Bee.—*S.*

of the great and the celebrated, yet exulting in their excellencies; desirous of encouraging inferior artists, by pointing out every gleam of merit in their works, and gently glancing at their errors; not to mortify by supercilious disdain, but usefully to correct the imagination and the hand from whence they proceed.

As to my exertions, I have ever made it a point to omit no duty, to neglect no claim of friendship, or even of civility, for the idle business of the muses. Generally finding the day too short for the various demands of the former, it is but seldom that I can make any addition to my miscellany, or attend to its revision; uncertain also whether, if I had time, I should have resolution to give it to the world. The arrogance and ignorance of the public critics, united to their strange influence upon the public opinions, keep dragon-watch around the Hesperian tree of fame. Some lines of mine, about fifty in number, had the honour of suggesting to Dr Darwin the first idea of the beauteous poem you mention, the new-risen sun of our poetic hemisphere. I wrote them in a valley near Lichfield, which was a mere morass, till drained, cultivated, and formed into a picturesque garden of botanic science, by the Doctor's forming hand. He had always very great poetic ta-

lents. Resident in Lichfield till the year 1781, he became a sort of poetic preceptor to me in my early youth. If I have critical knowledge in my favourite science, I hold myself chiefly indebted for it to him. Warned by the malign influence which Akenside and Armstrong's poetic fame had upon their medical practice, he would never, till now, venture to appear before the world as a bard. When I shewed him the poetic sketch I had made of his valley, in the year 1779, he was pleased with it, and said it should stand as the exordium of a poem, which he, that instant, conceived might be written to advantage upon the Linnean system, and under the Ovidian licence of transforming trees, shrubs, and flowers into fine ladies and gentlemen. From that instant he began the brilliant work you mention, which has been the amusement of his leisure hours through all the intervening years. For some reason, inscrutable to me, he publishes the second part first. A friend of his, Mr Stevens of Repton, I believe, sent my verses, describing this valley, to the Gentleman's Magazine for May 1783, with some change, and some additional lines in their close, made by Dr Darwin, for my verses contain no mention of the nymph of Botany. From that magazine they got into almost all the pub-

lic prints of that era, with my name affixed to them.

One of the notes to the part which the Doctor has just published, induces me to believe he retains his design of opening his first part with my sketch of the valley. Surely he judges wrong; so great a work ought not to contain lines, especially in the exordium, which are known to have been written by another.

In the year 1781, Dr Darwin married a young, lovely, and rich widow, who allured him to quit Lichfield and settle at Derby. Since that period I have seldom seen him, though he comes often to our city on medical visits. Now and then he writes to me, when the some-time poetical preceptor deigns to consult his pupil about the texture of his splendid web.

To embellish it, he has called in the aids of extraneous allusion, description, and imagery from all sciences, and all arts, and from the mythological machinery of all religions. As a work which applies to the imagination chiefly, it is perhaps one of the first in our language. He has certainly procured some ingenious friend or friends to fabricate the various reviews of this poem which have appeared in the public prints. The hireling critics, left to themselves, we should have seen very different strictures; for I am told this work

is praised with taste and discrimination, as if it was felt and understood:

> " Cou'd they do this?
> We know their handy-work."

Adieu!

LETTER LXXVIII.

Mrs Mompessan.

Lichfield, August 9, 1789.

Alas! dear friend, my poor father's convulsive attacks, always so perilous, and coming upon him with added frequency, I dare not leave him. Devoting myself so long to the tender and interesting duties of preserving, to my utmost power, his aged and feeble frame from pain and danger, I must not quit the filial post, now that the calls for maintaining it become more and more pressing. Therefore is it that my visits to your bower must, at present, be only ideal. Ideal visits I often pay you, see you posting round your sylvan walks, or sitting netting in your parlour, and thinking of

your absent friends. Truly sorry am I to learn how those kind meditations have of late been embittered by your sister Heathcote's alarming indisposition. May she soon be relieved from its dangers, and restored to that health which I so sincerely wish may be enjoyed by all who are near and dear to you!

Mr Burden will be a treasure to our little city, if he perseveres in his intention of becoming its inhabitant. I will not promise that our fine people shall value him for his intellectual superiorities, or taste for the arts; but there are a few of us who know how to estimate them, and since he has an easy fortune, and plays at cards, he will be welcome even to those who like nobody the better for being more enlightened than themselves.

Nothing, however, is more difficult to obtain than habitations in Lichfield for new settlers. As I conclude Mr Burden is a single man, he would doubtless wish ready-furnished lodgings. The most eligible we have, in my idea, are at present unengaged, and will be vacant in two months; their present possessor, Mrs Ironmonger, removing, at that time, to an house in St John's Street. All people of genius like a retired situation, a *rus in urbe*, if they settle in a city. With that taste these lodgings will not be deemed un-

pleasant, and Mr B. had better secure them immediately.

How I love that dear impatience of yours to pay every possible respect to those you love—living or dead! but am glad you were called upon to put off your mourning-robe, which affection had prematurely assumed.

My own situation makes me interested in the prolonged existence even of strangers, whose faded powers render them but useless burdens in the consideration of a busy world—since, probably, they may be as dear to some of their near connections as my poor father is to me.

Without the ties of consanguinity, you love Mr Sherwood for what he has been, and rejoice in the fallacy of a report which, I know, cost you sighs and tears. But you have a heart cast in no common mould, to whose warmth time, with all its wear and tear of the feelings, cannot impart the selfish chill; that chill which freezes all solicitude about those who can no longer serve or amuse us.

I am, my dear Mrs Mompessan, always yours.

LETTER LXXIX.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

August 17, 1789.

MY dear friend,—When you urged the necessity of an assiduously attentive friend and secretary to yourself, and an occasional preceptor to your darling, when indisposition or literary employment of another species should make it inconvenient to you to attend to him, I mentioned Mr W. as a person I know to be every way qualified for those trusts. I fear it will not be easy to find another companion of your travels so eligible in either sex, especially in ours. France may, however, perhaps supply you with what I think England could not, an amiable and accomplished woman, who durst put her peace and fame into the hazard of living domestically, during some years, with the most dazzling and engaging of mankind. Nothing but a considerable independent fortune can enable an amiable female to look down, without misery, upon the censures of the many; and even in that situation, their arrows have power to wound, if not to destroy peace. Surely no woman,

with a nice sense of honour,—and what is she worth who has it not?—would voluntarily expose herself to their aim, except she has unwarily *slid* into a situation where the affections, making silent and unperceived progress, have rendered it a less evil to endure the consciousness of a dubious fame, provided there is no real guilt, than to renounce the society of him, without whom creation seems a blank.

Why see we no account of a picture of Romney's in the Shakespearean Gallery?—Apropos of pictures, I have a very fine print of Sir Joshua's portrait of Mrs Siddons in the tragic muse; but the defects and incongruities of the situation and drapery amaze me—a heavy theatrical chair of state on the clouds, gold-lace and pearls, plaited hair, and the imperial tiara upon an allegorical figure, which sorrow and high-souled resolve must be supposed to have incapacitated for the studied labours of the toilette.

I want to read a new book, which I hope to get in a few days, because report says it is yours; but the title, Cornelia Sedley, or the Young Widow, has no sound Hayleyan. They tell me it is moral and religious; so there can be no reason for your having printed it anonymously. Probably the real author withholds his name, and has caused it to be given out to be yours, that it may

get into instant reading. The work must surely, however, be worth attention, or such report could not have obtained a shadow of credence.

The contemptible rage for novel-reading, is a pernicious and deplorably prevalent taste, which vitiates and palls the appetite for literary food of a more nutritive and wholesome kind. It surprises me that superior genius stoops to feed this reigning folly, to administer sweet poison for the age's tooth;—and yet when I find a work of that sort charming, I feel inclined to pardon the countenance the author gives to a destructive propensity.

Adieu!—In the trust that this letter will reach you before you embark for the continent, I commission it with my solicitous benedictions. Yours.

LETTER LXXX.

MISS WESTON.

Sept. 3, 1789.

I CONSIDER myself in debt to you, dear Sophia, for a very long, a more than very entertaining letter, which you sent me in July, and this

notwithstanding the short letters which have lately passed between us on the regretted renunciation of the purposed scheme.

After a five months elapse, since you heard from me in February, you make no single comment upon the contents of that my long epistle—not even acknowledge the receipt of it.

This habit, so invariably persisted in by Miss W., has been but lately adopted by you, who used to be in that method which can alone give letter-writing, however brilliantly executed, a right to the name of correspondence, viz. to have the letter we are answering before us, and commenting upon its passages, instead of passing them over in disregarding silence. I confess I think all the spirit of epistolary intercourse depends upon our adoption of that rule.

Somewhat too much of all this—let us pass on to matter of pleasanter interest.

Miss Nott is become a personage of considerable fortune, by the death of her brother—but it seems to produce no change in her way of life—no carriage, no additional servants. She is wise. —Parade would soon have swallowed up the added fruits of her income, and probably left her less real plenty than she had before. Our establishment must be a degree below our income, if we would sleep in peace. O! that certain friends of

ours did feel this truth, as their sense and virtues make one expect they should feel it! I know Miss Nott to be generous while she is prudent.

Miss Maylin seems, from your description, the very being you ought to wish her. Where there is so much youth and beauty, that slumber of the passions makes well for the peace of a monitory friend—while the advantages, beneath your roof, from the accomplishments and manners of her instructress, are eminently calculated to inspirit her serenity.

You are very good to wish me in your family, but I am fixed, by my apprehensions, here, like the needle to its magnet; holding constant, though trembling residence.

If Miss Williams complied with my request, you have read, in the letter she was to shew you, my opinions of Zeluco, and also of the unaccountable farrago of wit, and disgraceful vulgarity of expression—lively, interesting, striking remarks, and sickening affectation—historic knowledge, and language that would shame a schoolgirl, interspersed with some few sentences exempted from these deeply sullying stains, and truly eloquent.

Miss Williams makes a poetically sacrilegious comparison of these volumes to the plays of

Shakespeare, where gross and glaring defects are atoned at full, by the largely preponderating beauties; but the defects of Shakespeare sprung entirely from the false taste of his times; and at a period when the general style was loaded with vulgarism, was stiff and barbarous, his is generally nervous, brilliant, musical—his expressions beyond attainment happy; and, in fine, his style one of his chief beauties. In these volumes it is ungrammatic, confused, and barbarous, at a juncture in which language has acquired its utmost degree of refinement, its last polish. Miss W. pleads again, that the author has been led into this grossness by adopting a colloquial style. It was extremely possible to have done that without any sins against perspicuity, grammatic accuracy, and elegance. The fictitious letters of Lovelace and Belford, Miss Howe, and Lady G., and the real ones of Gray, breathe the language of conversation. Their gay undress is of the purest muslin, whose folds float about them in stainless purity, and graceful ease. The undress of these volumes is as a soiled, patched, and unfashionable garb upon a very handsome woman, and its being sprinkled over with valuable gems, but renders its squalidness the more disgusting.

Nothing can exceed, in degree, my wonder and disappointment to meet such a jargon, where I

had promised myself a feast of Attic flavour. You know how much I had been charmed with the author's conversation. Interested in her fame, I lose all patience when I reflect how fully she possesses the powers to have rendered this work one of the most charming in our language. Her matter, in the style of the letter to which I am now replying, would have spread her fame over all the world.

Few things would be more pleasing to me than to sit in the grotto of Pope, and to wander amid the walks and bowers which he planted.

You felt those thrills of local delight, though you confess that the sad realities of life have taken off the edge of your poetical enthusiasm. Had it ever been keen, my Sophia, those said realities would have possessed no such power. When the spirit grows sick of their fallacy, it naturally returns, with double zest, to the unalloyed pleasures held out to our sympathy by exalted imaginations. The world grows dusky and faded in our eyes—the morning rays of hope illumine it no longer. Then do we say to ourselves,

> "So much the rather, thou celestial light,
> Shine inward, and the mind thro' all her powers
> Irradiate!"

Miss Mathias is very good to love me so partially; and it is like a warm friend in you to love her the better on that account; but she has superior claims to your esteem in her own various merits.

I am glad you converse often with Colonel Barry. Such Colonels are somewhat scarce.

When I mentioned Pope, knowing that he pleases you above all other poets, I ought to have observed, that if you will take the trouble of procuring the Gentleman's Magazine of April, May, and June last, you will in them find me asserting the claims of Pope against those who deny to them splendour of imagination, beauty of style, and general superiority to Dryden in the path where each are most frequently found, the ten-feet couplet; for in lyric poetry he was inferior to Dryden. Your ingenious namesake has conceived a violent prejudice against Pope, and has published an essay to prove that, what he calls Pope's false brilliance, profuse ornaments, and laboured polish, have produced that universal degeneracy which, he says, now prevails in the art.

Conscious that this strange opinion has been creeping into fashion long before it was so very openly asserted, I entered into the controversy, and maintained that it is false two ways—equally

injurious to the high poetic claims of the present age, and to his who first taught that perfection in poems written in rhyme, which refines all the dross from the golden language of genius.

I passed some hours last Tuesday in conversing with Lady Gresley of Bath, whom I have not seen during a period of near twenty years. I find her now what I thought her then, very sweet and interesting. She spoke of you, and of the dear ——s with great regard, but shook her head over the superb furniture of their house, and of routs that assembled three hundred people. I said I fancied not much of the furniture was new. She said, all seemed new, and magnificent in a degree very inconsistent with less than a very opulent fortune. Alas! what infatuation! what are they doing but dazzling and exciting the envy of fools, and the censure of the wise.

Adieu! my dear Sophia.

LETTER LXXXI.

MRS HAYLEY.

Sept. 25, 1789.

I WISHED to have answered dear Mrs Hayley's letter sooner, but my correspondence has been sluiced off into such a variety of channels, as to load me with the imputation of a thousand seeming neglects, which my heart regrets in vain.

The death of Mrs French gave me more concern than we usually feel for the departure of those whom we do not personally know. Her character had interested me, and I looked forward with pleasure to the expectation of becoming acquainted with her. I was sorry also on your account. The loss of such a friend must make a chasm in your comforts and pleasures, which the limited intercourses of a provincial town do not readily or soon supply,—but the vitality of friendship drops off, branch after branch, as we stay upon the earth.

One day last week, I was honoured by a visit from two young ambassadors of the court of Portugal —one to Denmark, the other to the Hague. They

brought letters of introduction. It surprised me to find them so well masters of our language, and so familiar with the characteristic graces of our deceased poets—but the envy of contemporaries —the desire, stupid as unjust, which all ages have shewn, to persuade themselves that genius is, during their day, in a state of degeneracy, prevents the growth and expansion of an author's reputation, till his eyes are eternally closed upon its lustre. I could not, however, help feeling indignant surprise, that Mr Hayley's works had not, by our soul-less countrymen, been mentioned to these ingenious foreigners, whose evident taste for the English classics, and acquaintance with their beauties, disgraces the comparative ignorance of our own men of fashion, and the unpatriotic pedantry of our scholars. The latter are generally owls and bats to genius, which is not presented to them through the medium of a dead language, or at least a foreign. This stupid silence to these gentlemen, upon what ought to be our boast, is the more strange, because of that warm, generous, and beautiful eulogium, in Mr Hayley's poem on Epic Composition, which twines the wreath of preeminence over all the Spanish bards, around the brows of the epic poet Camoens, of whom Portugal is so justly proud. I read the passage to the ambassadors, and the tears of delight rushed

into their eyes. They requested its reiteration—told me they should carry Mr Hayley's works back with them to Portugal, and spread the fame and generosity of their author along the shores of the Tagus.

Ah! you read Mr ——— aright; he is very brilliant, very engaging, but much too fine to pay any attention to the communication of little plans which have no interest in common with his pleasures. He did indeed say he had seen you, but made no mention of what you desired him to inform me, that kindly purposed visit of Mrs French and yourself, which the death of that lady so cruelly prevented.

Our races were very brilliant; rank, youth, and distinguished beauty, with all the advantages of jewels, and picturesque ornaments, swarmed over the ball-room. I designed accompanying my friends and guests, Lady Blakiston, Colonel and Miss Cane, into the gay crowd, and made up a dress for the purpose; but a perilous attack of my father's, the preceding Saturday, incapacitated me for cheerful endurance of the frizzeur's operations, and other uninteresting attentions of the toilette. As it happened, Lady B. was too much irritated to go into public, by a sudden influx and reflux of affectionate pleasure. It was occasioned by the not so early expected appearance of a be-

loved sister, whom she had not seen for nine years; and that of a scarce less beloved nephew, just returned from a sixteen years residence in the East Indies. They staid only a few hours the first race-day, and left my friend to grieve for their departure, ere the kiss of welcome was grown cold upon her lip.

Tempted by the golden afternoon, I have taken a long walk. It has fatigued me too much to prolong my letter. Adieu, therefore, dear Mrs Hayley, and believe me always—Yours.

LETTER LXXXII.

To the Editor of the General Evening Post.

Oct. 11, 1789.

Sir,—There is a little misinformation in your account of the late Mr Day of Anningsly. His estate, after paying his mother's jointure, which he had generously augmented, was twelve hundred per annum. He married the ingenious and amiable Miss Mills of Yorkshire, whose fortune was twenty-three thousand pounds.

In his death, the indigent of his neighbourhood have an unspeakable loss—but let him be spoken of as he was, for truth is better than indiscriminate eulogium.

Mr Day, with very first-rate abilities, was a splenetic, capricious, yet bountiful misanthropist. He bestowed nearly the whole of his ample fortune in relieving the necessities of the poor; frequently, however, declaring his conviction, that there were few in the large number he fed, who would not cut his throat the next hour, if their interest could prompt the act, and their lives be safe in its commission. He took pride in avowing his abhorrence of the luxuries, and disdain of even the decencies of life; and in his person, he was generally slovenly, even to squalidness. On being asked by one of his friends, why he chose the lonely and unpleasant situation in which he lived? He replied, that the sole reason of that choice was, its being out of the stink of human society.

It had been said, and I believe with truth, that he put a total stop to all correspondence between Mrs Day and her large and respectable family-connections in Yorkshire, who had never ceased to regret so undeserved an instance of morose deprivation. She not only sacrificed her friends to gratify her husband's unsocial spleen, but all the

comforts of that affluence to which she had been accustomed. Before this lady married our gloomy philosopher, her generosity had been eminently distinguished in the large social circle in which she moved. Society is the proper sphere of action for the benevolent virtues. It is the duty of those who possess such virtues to exert them there, that the influence of excellent example may not be lost upon mankind, through the inevitable disgust it must receive from voluntary seclusion, and avowed contempt.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER LXXXIII.

Rev. Dr Warner.

Nov. 5.

Welcome home again, my dear Mercury, for the great Babylon seems, in my contemplations, a sort of desart without you. What an eternal rambler you are!—but I must not be an austere mistress, and deny you leave of absence, nor yet make consent ungracious, by giving it in a grumbling accent. You will stay at home till spring—

and Heaven knows where several of us may be ere that day! So many of my acquaintance have, of late, died suddenly, that I often feel my spirits tinged with an apprehensive gloom, which tells me health itself, and middle life, form a tenure scarce less frail than disease and old age, by which to hold the lives of those we love.

Mr Selwyn obliged me more than I can express by his kind visit. Regret will intrude upon all our pleasures, and she insisted upon her sigh of tribute for the shortness of that interview. Mr Selwyn has sweet manners. You would learn from your friend how much my poor father has lost of the little he retained when you saw him, of talents and animation, that once lifted him much above the every-day mortals; but all in him is second childhood now, with the melancholy difference of intellectual retrogression instead of advancement. Yet, yet how much I dread to see this vegetation cease, I might, philosophically speaking, be half-ashamed to confess. The voice of nature, however, pleads for the excess of this feeling, and his exemption from suffering acquits it of crime.

The inclosed will shew you what haste I make to avail myself of your vowed services, over which I am at once pleased, proud, and grateful.

Assure Mr Selwyn how much of all these I felt myself on Sunday se'ennight about two o'clock.

You do not think of going to France, I trust, since there is little hope that her convulsive struggles will subside so soon. Adieu!

LETTER LXXXIV.

Mr Cary.

Dec. 19, 1789.

Here is the task you sent me from the Italian. I have made it an Idyllium; for, as to sonnet, there is a gravity in the air of English sonnet-measure, ill-suited to such a playful bagatelle. After all, this is just that sort of poetry which, containing nothing intrinsically that deserves the name, is indebted for its power of pleasing to a certain nameless grace of manner, and turn of expression, which inevitably evaporate, in their transfusion from a peculiarly sweet, into an harsher, though perhaps a grander, language.

You had received this attempt sooner, but the ability to employ myself has been all this week annihilated, by a dreadful shock my spirits receiv-

ed in the sudden death of poor faithful old Thomas Reid, who nursed, and watched, and protected my dear helpless, and "child-changed" father. The awful and heart-affecting scene passed before these eyes, that had never beheld a human being expire. It has left an impression which will, I believe, never be effaced. Perfectly well, till the instant of his seizure on Sunday morning, from which moment he lived only three hours! The next Wednesday evening no vestige left of him upon earth! I have not words to express how much it affected me to hear him say, while he knew he was dying,—"Let my master (who was going to breakfast) have three dishes of tea." The very last words he spoke were when my little dog sprung upon his knee, as he sat in the arm-chair, and ran up his breast, visibly alarmed, and soliciting, with her little foot, the attention of her dying bedfellow, "O! poor Sappho! I can do no more for thee!"

Then was it, and often after, through this week, so deeply shadowed over to me by the consciousness of death, that the pathetic exclamation of Werter rushed upon my mind: "Last night he stood upright; he had all his strength—this morning he lies cold, stiff, insensate.——What is death?—we do but dream when we talk of it! Such are the limits of our feeble nature, we have no clear con-

ceptions of the beginning, or of the end of our existence. This hour I possess myself, and all my powers, corporal and intellectual—the next, perhaps, dead—yet a few more, and shut up in a pit!—so deep! so cold! so dark!—Death! grave! I understand not the words!"

It will scarcely at present be in my power to attempt the Italian sonnet which you think so sublime. Mr White has brought Lavater on Physiognomy; and, as it is borrowed for me, I must not detain it. The subject of this same sonnet, the cities of Catania and Syracuse swallowed up by an earthquake, is certainly of the last solemnity; but I do not think the author has treated it in the best-possible manner at the opening; the unpathetic play upon the word *yourselves*, is one of those Italian conceits which always displease me. On this terrific theme it does more than displease me. If I attempt the sonnet in English, I shall discard it entirely. Here it conveys at once a conceit and an untruth, since, though there might then remain no visible trace of those cities, testimonies of themselves did certainly remain *in* themselves, and, by digging deep enough, might as certainly be found as the traces of Herculaneum, or the city Pompeia, which, a Venetian gentleman said, as recorded by Mrs Piozzi, an English hen and chickens might scratch

up in a week, so lightly are they covered by pumice-stones and ashes. The conclusion of this sonnet is truly sublime. I should like to perceive language occurring to me capable of doing it justice; but of such propitious inspiration I have little hope. I deliver up my present leisure to Lavater, and remain sincerely yours.

LETTER LXXXV.

Mrs Piozzi.

Dec. 21.

And so, my dear Madam, you wish me to write a tragedy. Alas! if I had powers, I have not leisure for an attempt, to which the polite, though probably mistaken, confidence you express in my abilities might else stimulate my exertions; yet, in despite of this encouraging confidence, the task would be attended with more anxiety than I have fortitude to encounter; and, if I had leisure to attempt, and courage to hope a conquest over all these restraining considerations, the recollection how coolly Jephson's noble tragedies have

been received, would freeze the Melpomenean ink in my standish.

Suffer me now to speak to you of your highly ingenious, instructive, and entertaining publication*; yet shall it be with the sincerity of friendship, rather than with the flourish of compliment. No work of the sort I ever read possesses, in an equal degree, the power of placing the reader in the scenes, and amongst the people it describes. Wit, knowledge, and imagination illuminate its pages—but the infinite inequality of the style!—permit me to acknowledge to you what I have acknowledged to others, that it excites my exhaustless wonder, that Mrs Piozzi, the child of genius, the pupil of Johnson, should pollute, with the vulgarisms of unpolished conversation, her animated pages!—that, while she frequently displays her power of commanding the most chaste and beautiful style imaginable, she should generally use those inelegant, those strange *dids*, and *does*, and *thoughs*, and *toos*, which produce jerking angles, and stop-short abruptness, fatal at once to the grace and ease of the sentence;—which are, in language, what the rusty black silk handkerchief and the brass ring are upon the beautiful form of

* Her Travels.

the Italian Countess she mentions, arrayed in embroidery, and blazing in jewels.

Ah! madam, could I have thought that you would perpetually write, and commit to press, "sure enough," for *certainly*,—"I tried at him," for, *I tried to persuade him*,—"he hit it," for *he discovered*—with a large &c. of congenial and untranslatable expressions; especially, as you observe, in your charming letters to Dr Johnson, which are before the public, some much slighter inelegancies of this kind, in Addison's writings, and justly say that they are pardonable only from the graces and purity of style being less understood in his day than in ours. Upon the miracle of their descending from your pen, many of my literary acquaintance have written to me. How easily might you have removed—how well would it answer the trouble, of even yet, against future editions, removing these blemishes—these sullying veins from your gems! Such polish, far from diminishing, would add to the grace and ease of the work. What can be more light, easy, and gay, than the style of Lovelace's letters in the immortal Clarissa? And yet they are wholly free from colloquial barbarisms, as your Colossus used to term them. With what pleasure should I see this your cluster of intellectual jewels, appearing through future editions, in cloudless brilliance! That done,

and the Travels of Mrs Piozzi will be one of the first ornaments of that class of reading.

But my confessions of amazement are not yet terminated. All your poetic readers whom I converse with, unite with me in wonder to see you exalting, in this work, a strange, nauseous, vulgar poem*, above all other poetry; a poem whose general darkness is rendered more visible by a few flashes of genius; to see you asserting that it transcends every other poetic composition as much as the Apollo, the Venus, and the Flora Farnese transcend the sculpture of Sansovino. Homer, Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Gray, must, if this decision be just, resign the palm of excellence to Mr Merry. We scarce believe our eyes as we read!—especially after having read that beautiful Parthenopean Ode, which induces us to look up to the poetic taste and judgment of its author with so much respect. We look,—and lo! she decrees the meed to a Pan, from all the Apollos, past and present.

And now, my dear Madam, can you forgive this naked sincerity from one who makes it a point of honour to speak her undisguised ideas, if she speaks at all, to her literary friends on their compositions. It was with equal freedom that I

* Merry's Paulina, or Russian Daughter.—S.

spoke to our poetic darling, Mr Hayley, of that ingenious and learned work*, in which wicked wit seduced him into the ungenerous conduct of betraying the cause of which he stood forth as the champion; and of increasing, by his sarcasms, the unjust contempt in which the unprotected part of our oppressed sex are held in their declining days; and it was thus that I acknowledged to him, amidst my warm admiration of all his other writings, that I thought his correct and polished tragedies, like Johnson's Irene, wanted force, variety, and fire.

You ask me if I am interested in the question, whether Hayley's Young Widow, Cornelia, or Moore's Zeluco, be the superior work. I am indeed interested in Mr Hayley's fame, and I have felt and admired the powers of Dr Moore's genius in the masterly portraits of his novel; but I have not read Cornelia; since, by what I hear of it, I do not believe it Mr Hayley's. Having twice published anonymously, and perhaps imagining that he may again so publish, produces, doubtless, the resolve he acknowledges, never to disavow any composition which the world chooses to impute to him; otherwise his silence concerning anonymous works, which are really his, would be

a tacit confession, totally frustrating the design of concealment. I have no time to waste over novels of mediocrity. Those great, various, sublime, and beautiful works, the Clarissa and Grandison, to which I frequently recur with unabated delight, when I choose to give my understanding and my imagination the highest possible feast;—yes, it is they who render almost all other novels insipid to me. The Sorrows of Werter, the Old English Baron, the Caroline of Lichfield, the Lady Catesby's Letters and Excursion, by Mrs Brooke, are the only things of the sort, published within these late years, which have strongly fascinated me. I confess the genius and excellence of the justly celebrated Burney's. In many parts they interest, in many affect, but quite as often weary me; and my spirit finds no warm enchantment on their pages. Their low and insipid characters are too frequently obtruded. It is well to intermix such personages, but not well to produce them often, or detain them long. I no more like attending to their conversation upon paper, than I should like their society in real life.

Zeluco is a work of considerable ability. I have been vainly wishing for leisure to give it a second reading, assured that I shall then be more gratified, when satisfied curiosity, respecting the

fate of the principal characters, shall allow me to examine the merit of the frequent episodes.

I cannot quit the subject of imaginary histories, without speaking to you of the great pleasure I have received from the animated testimonies in your Tour, to the intuitive powers of my half-adored Richardson. Charming is your transition to the Poretto family, when you describe the proud, the bigotted, and melancholy Bologna.

It is very polite to assure me that I should be welcome in the London circles;—but I feel so deep a sense of wanting power to add any thing to their spirit, and the circles to which I have been long confined by my duties, are so insensible to all which I might perhaps give them, that the hitherto ungratified thirst of retirement increases fast upon me, as life advances.

I was taught to hope, from Helen Williams and Sophia Weston, that you would have passed through Lichfield in your rambles, but, like the sister hope of *their* visit, it vanished.

Mr Piozzi's kind postcript to your last, obliges me extremely; tell him so, I entreat you, and add my best compliments.

Adieu! my dear Madam—believe me, with every conviction of your energetic and brilliant abilities, which put our sex's indolence to shame, faithfully yours.

LETTER LXXXVI.

To the EDITOR of the GENERAL EVENING POST.

Dec. 24, 1789.

SIR,—I am induced, by a paragraph in one of your late papers, to assure you, upon authority, that Miss Seward has no tragedy in contemplation; that if she could imagine she possessed dramatic talents, their exertion would be repressed by recollecting the coolness with which Mr Jephson's three last fine tragedies were received; and by the blindness of our public critics to their excellence. Bold metaphoric language, and striking imagery, in energetic, yet simple phrase, is the Shakespearean style; but if, like Mr Jephson, a writer adopts it, he is reproached with imitating Shakespeare. Every dramatic author is of some school, either of the Grecian, the French, or the English. Which of these is best by their fruits, we have known.

He who writes tragedies, should endeavour to catch a portion of that spirit which reigns over every heart that can feel, and over every under-

standing that can receive and retain forcible impressions. To the vigour of thought and language, he should add that just contempt for the pedantic rules of Aristotle which shall enable him to shew the persons of his drama in various situations. So shall he escape the necessity of supplying the place of business, and of incident, by long and frigid declamation. I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER LXXXVII.

Mrs Taylor

Jan. 13, 1790.

No, indeed, and indeed, my dear friend, neither to fickleness or disregard, or shadow of picque, has my silence been owing. Convinced that an alarming oppression at my stomach, and difficulty of breathing, which attacked me last spring, was owing to too much sedentary employment, I reluctantly determined to make longer pauses than usual between my replies to the letters of my correspondents.

Very eloquently did your letter of May the 5th describe the sweetness of maternal happiness.

Late Miss Scott.

That happiness must vary its form, but never will it be more delicious and unallayed, than while your infant draws her sustenance from your bosom.

Heaven yet indulges to my prayers and wishes the existence of my not less dear, because "child-changed father;" but it is an anxious and alarmed life that I live, better, however, far better, than that of lonely orphanism. Your warm praise of my two sonnets in the Gentleman's Magazine for March 1789, delights me. Sonnet-writing suits my scantiness of leisure, better than any other kind of verse composition. The consciousness of being involved in a work of length, often unable to procure an hour in a week to go on with it, would be oppressive. If Miss Williams can obtain seclusion competent to the epic task, which you wish to see attempted by one of us, I shall be glad—but nothing is more impossible than that I should procure it; and if I could, Captain Cook, great and good as he was, should not be my hero; because my elegy is in a degree epic, and forming a compendium of his character, his virtues, and his adventures, would involve an inevitable awkwardness, were the same pen to dilate what it had previously, and by choice, compressed.

I think entirely with you, that Miss Williams was not happy in her choice of measure, in the poem on the Slave Trade. I told her so; yet

praised, as with truth I could, its numerous and great beauties.

My critical antagonist on the subject of Dryden and Pope, is not related to Sophia Weston. His profession, music, and organist of Solihul. He has wonderful genius, much knowledge, and an honest generous disposition; but it is an impetuous creature, a child of prejudice, and, as I think, he has convinced you, a much better poet than critic. You have read beautiful sonnets of his in the Gentleman's Magazine for November 1788.

It is very true, as you observe, Johnson appears much more amiable as a domestic man, in his letters to Mrs Thrale, than in any other memorial which has been given us of his life and manners; but that was owing to the care with which Mrs Piozzi weeded them of the prejudiced and malevolent passages on characters, perhaps much more essentially worthy than himself, were they to be tried by the rules of Christian charity. I do not think with you, that his ungrateful virulence against Mrs Thrale, in her marrying Piozzi, arose from his indignation against her on his deceased friend's account. Mr Boswell told me Johnson wished, and expected to have married her himself. You ask who the Molly Aston was, whom those letters mention with such passionate tenderness? Mr Walmsley, my father's predecessor in this

house, was, as you have heard, Johnson's Mecænas, and this lady, his wife's sister, a daughter of Sir Thomas Aston, a wit, a beauty, and a toast. Johnson was always fancying himself in love with some princess or other. His wife's daughter, Lucy Porter, so often mentioned in those letters, was his first love, when he was a school-boy, under my grandfather, a clergyman, vicar of St Mary's, and master of the free-school, which, by his scholastic ability, was high in fame, and thronged with pupils, from some of the first gentlemens' families in this and the adjoining counties. To the free-school the boys of the city had a right to come, but every body knows how superficial, in general, is unpaid instruction. However, my grandfather, aware of Johnson's genius, took the highest pains with him, though his parents were poor, and mean in their situation, keeping market stalls, as battledore booksellers. Johnson has not had the gratitude once to mention his generous master, in any of his writings; but all this is foreign to your inquiries, who Miss Molly Aston was, and at what period his flame for her commenced? It was during those school-days, when the reputation of Johnson's talents, and rapid progress in the classics, induced the noble-minded Walmsley to endure, at his elegant table, the low-born squalid youth—here that he suffered him and Garrick,° to

"imp their eagle wings," a delighted spectator and auditor of their efforts. It was here, that Miss Molly Aston was frequently a visitor in the family of her brother-in-law, and probably amused herself with the uncouth adorations of the learned, though dirty stripling, whose mean appearance was overlooked, because of the genius and knowledge that blazed through him; though with "umbered flames," from constitutional melancholy and spleen. Lucy Porter, whose visit to Lichfield had been but for a few weeks, was then gone back to her parents at Birmingham, and the brighter Molly Aston became the Laura of our Petrarch. Fired, however, at length, with ideal love, and incapable of inspiring mutual inclinations in the young and lively, he married, at twenty-three, the mother of his Lucy, and went to seek his fortune in London. She had borne an indifferent character, during the life of her first husband. He died insolvent, leaving his three grown-up children, dependent on the bounty of his rich bachelor brother in London, who left them largely, but would never do any thing for the worthless widow, who had married "the literary cub," as he used to call him. She lived thirty years with Johnson; if shuddering, half-famished, in an author's garret, could be called living.

During her life, the fair and learned devotee,

Miss H. Boothby, in the wane of her youth, a woman of family and genteel fortune, encouraged him to resume his Platonisms. After the death of this wife, and this spiritualized mistress, Mrs Thrale took him up. He loved her for her wit, her beauty, her luxurious table, her coach, and her library; and she loved him for the literary consequence his residence at Streatham threw around her. The rich, the proud, and titled literati, would not have sought Johnson in his dirty garret, nor the wealthy brewer's then uncelebrated wife, without the actual presence, in her saloon *d' Apollon*, of a votary known to be of the number of the inspired.

Into the minds of the parents of our poetic Nisus and Euryalus, Cary and Lister, a prejudice has been instilled, that their imaginative talents are more likely to be a misfortune than a blessing to them. Beneath its influence they have turned a jaundiced eye upon their friendship, and actually prohibited all epistolary correspondence between them, though they are suffered to visit sometimes. Lister is of our city—Cary's habitation eight miles distant. I must observe, that though they have thus needlessly mortified and hurt the tender minds of these youths, yet are Mr and Mrs Lister visibly proud of their son's uncommon talents, and sedulous in-

dustry—they boast of the sweetness of his temper, which indeed shines out of his clear blue eyes, for he is beautiful as a vernal morning; somewhat, however, too decisive in his opinions, for years so blossoming. Cary's disposition is more saturnine. I think his genius the stronger of the two, but he has the same tenacious spirit of decision, the same thirst after knowledge, the same unwearied application, the same exemption from every immoral tendency. He is going to Oxford, Lister to Cambridge. This choice of different universities is, I apprehend, purposed, lest the enthusiasts should feed each others poetic flame. How finely is this pusillanimous dread delineated in Mr Hayley's Essays on Epic Poetry.

Adieu! my dear Mrs Taylor; never, for a moment, believe it possible I can forsake such friends as yourself, that have been

"Through twenty summers ripening in my heart."

LETTER LXXXVIII.

H. CARY, ESQ.

Jan. 21, 1790.

THANK you for the prose translation of Filicaja's Sonnet on the degeneracy of Italy, her desertion of her ancient valour, and devotion to indolence, shadowed forth by allegoric allusion to the infidelity of a once faithful wife to an honourable husband. In your prose of his sonnet to the ingulfed cities, my versification of which has had the honour to please you, I acknowledged, for I felt the extreme sublimity of the concluding apostrophe. It is an idea, an image far above the achievement of a prose-man's conceptions, however naturally strong, however cultivated by literary application; it is born of genius only. "Arise, ye overwhelmed cities! display your vast portent, and let your horrible skeletons be dreaded by all ages!"

But for the conclusion of the sonnet in question, which you say nearly equals the other in sublimity.—"Sleep on, vile adultress, till the avenging sword rouses, and slays thee in the em-

braces of thy paramour"—it is a spirited, but surely not a sublime apostrophe; no creation of the poet's fancy, but furnished by common life, a threat which connubial vengeance has often executed. Neither life nor human possibility presented the other, which thrills us with an indistinct, yet horrible image, that, like Milton's personification of death, is more dreadful, because the imagination refuses to present it distinctly.

The sonnet on Italian degeneracy would, on the whole, perhaps, have appeared finer to me than it does, were I not aware from whence the idea is drawn, and of its inferiority to its original in the Sacred Writings. Your avowed blindness to their numerous sublimities is one of those prejudices that dims, at times, the general lustre of your judgment. You will, perhaps, retain that blindness when you have examined the sources of Filicaja's ideas in this second sonnet, which I shall here present to you;—but if you do retain it, you will more powerfully uphold your own strange idea, that a poetic imagination incapacitates the mind for a poignant and judicious perception of poetic excellencies and defects in the writings of others, than any nonsense with which Boileau may furnish you in its favour.

I have not time to collect the ensuing quotations from examination—I give them from me-

mory—they will, therefore, perhaps not be verbally exact.

The desolation of Zion, collected from different parts of the Sacred Prophecies :

" How is the faithful city become as an harlot, as a wife that hath forgotten her vows! How doth she sit solitary, that was full of people!—she that was a princess among the nations, how is she become desolate! The rejoicing city, she that said in her heart, ' I am, and there is none beside me,' how is she fallen!

" Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim! for they have slightly healed the hurt of the daughter of Zion, saying, peace! when there was no peace. Her glorious beauty is become as a fading flower; as hasty fruit before the summer. Was there no balm in Gilead, was there no physician there, that the health of the daughter of Zion might have been restored!

" She is as an oak, whose leaf withereth; as a garden, where there is no water. She hath lost the staff of her might, the stay of her strength, the captain of fifty, and the counsellor, the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. Children behave themselves proudly against the ancient, and base ones against the honourable. The elders of her cities sit silent on the ground, the virgins of

Jerusalem bow their heads to the earth. Her people have fled from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. Her sons have fainted; they lie in her streets like a wild bull in the net! Her gates are on the ground; her princes are in other lands, and her prophets have no visions from the Lord. Desolate shall she sit in the dust, for her sun is gone down while it is yet day.

"There is no strength in thy high places, O! daughter of Zion! Strangers, that tarried in thy vineyards, and made an home in thy cities, pass through thy lands like a river. Those that hate thee, cry out and say, 'bow thyself low, that we may go over thee!' and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, even as the street, to the passenger. It is thus that thou hast cast thyself down, thou that didst weaken the nations."

So much for Oriental against Italian poetry.

I shall leave the Petrarch to Lister. Since the conclusion of the sonnet turns upon the conceit of the rocks becoming enamoured, through habits of echoing Laura's praises, its banishment would make the versification too unlike the original; and *I do not like to* make my taste responsible for the selection of such affected composition, how great soever the name of its original.

I do not conceive that any problem in mathe-

matics can be more demonstrable, than that the prose-critic, compared to the poetic one, is just as an unscientific observer of painting, and auditor of music, to the discerning glance of a Reynolds, and the awakened ear of an Haydn. The astonishing differences in the opinions of good poets upon the comparative merits of their brethren, ancient and modern, arise from various causes; oftenest, perhaps, from a selfish desire to exalt, above all other kind of writing, that in which themselves succeed best, and to depreciate excellencies, in a different line, which they either want the inclination or the power to acquire.

You instance Corneille's known preference of Lucan to Virgil, in corroboration of your opinion, that poets are inevitably incompetent critics. Corneille is said to be the boldest and most original poet of the French nation; but it is allowed that Racine outshone him in the polished graces of style. Conscious that they were not his fort, he probably taught himself to hold them in undue contempt. As they form the principal excellence of the imitative Virgil, it was perhaps natural that Corneille should prefer to him the more dashing, more original, though less perfect, Lucan, just as some few of our good poets prefer Dryden to Pope. Racine would have given no such preference; but Shakespeare might, could he

have studied Virgil and Lucan. Milton, again, would not. But these, and an hundred similar instances of clashing opinions amongst the bards, concerning each other's productions, will never prove that the opaque imagination of the prose-critic will enable him to judge better of difficulties he never knew, or to decide more acutely concerning the different degree of heat in fires which were never kindled in his own bosom:

> "Let such teach others who themselves excel,
> And censure freely who have written well."

Of prose-men critics I have long been sick, from Warburton, Kames, and ——, down to ——, to ——, and Headly!—How superior to theirs the criticisms of Pope, Warton, and Hayley!—Of Johnson I say nothing, because he suffered prejudice and envy to warp his truth, and blunt his sensibility, else what prose-man could have been found so able?

By the way, one of the above-named prose-critics, Headly's book, has been boring me lately with its supremely dull preferences of second and third-rate poets of Elizabeth's day, to the brightest and purest efforts of modern genius. This gentleman is the twin-brother, in judgment, and the applauder of ——, alias ——.

After the critic in question has decried Pope and the moderns, with Westonian prejudice, and after pronouncing that bell-man dialogue, between the man and the woman, superior to Prior's thrice beautiful work upon that rude and barren foundation, his Henry and Emma, which this author calls, in derision, " Matt's versification-piece," he stuffs a large quarto volume with extracts from these exploded gentry, in all of which, collectively, the sum of poetic beauty does not amount to what may be extracted from any ten stanzas of Beattie's Minstrel; any three pages of Cowper's Task, or of Hayley's Triumphs of Temper; while all that remains in the thick and close-printed volume, after the deduction of those few striking passages, is but an heap of rhyming rubbish, forced conceits, vile quibbling, frittered sense, metaphysic vulgarisms, and incongruous metaphor.

This same critic censures Prior for omitting the tender apostrophe of Emma to her mother, which we find in the original. It appears to me that the poet shewed great judgment in this omission. We have difficulty enough in excusing, even in consideration of an attachment so tender, pure, and enthusiastic, Emma's resolve to abandon her indulgent father, and to follow the fortunes of a mysterious and unknown lover, whose

suit had been so suspiciously clandestine, and who acknowledges the commission of murder. The image of a sorrowing mother, presenting itself in vain to the imagination of that love-devoted maid, would not have heightened our sympathy with her distress. Aware that it would not, Prior informs us, that his heroine lost her mother in infancy:

> "They call'd her Emma, for the beauteous dame,
> Who gave the virgin birth, had borne the name."

By the word *had*, we learn that she was no more at the period of this jealous experiment.

So much for Mr Headly, that prose-man decider upon the constituent excellencies of genuine poetry.

My poor father has lately suffered extremely from the paroxysms of a violent cough, to which his strength seems very unequal. To-night he seems better. God grant he may continue to amend—and may you, dear Cary, never know the misery of witnessing pains and struggles which you cannot soften, in an object exquisitely dear to you!

LETTER LXXXIX.

MISS WESTON.

Feb. 9, 1790.

SINCE I last conversed with you upon paper, my dear Sophia, months have hurried away, whose every hour presented claims upon my attention, oppressive from their number, and often painful from their nature. I lead an anxious and fearful, as well as busy life; struggling to preserve a precarious blessing, which seems every moment ready to elude my grasp. Nor is it alone of filial dread that my spirit is sick—shadows of apprehension often lour upon me from another quarter, in some alarming symptoms of declining health in that disinterested faithful friend, whose distinguished virtues have so long been dear to me.

You have doubtless heard of Charlotte Rogers' smiling fortune, in captivating the heart of a man of considerable estate and acknowledged merit. Gentle, benevolent, intelligent; it is of little moment that Mr Zachary has but one arm, and is a Quaker. He retains none of that rigidity which teaches many of his sect to fancy cri-

minality in fashionable apparel, and in partaking the public amusements.

If you have seen Mr ——— since his return to town, you are doubtless acquainted with the dissolution of all intercourse and companionship between me and his Lichfield friend, who has lately assumed airs of superiority and contempt in public company, rudely contradicting every opinion I advanced. I was sorry, on many accounts, that he forced me to shun him—I bore much ere I took the resolution, on account of our long acquaintance, of the bounty of his spirit to those that wanted his generosity; for his amiable sister's sake, and for the sake of another lady in Lichfield whom I esteem—but I was not to forget what I owed to myself.

Notwithstanding my estrangement from the house where he sojourned, Mr ——— often called upon me, and passed two afternoons and one evening here. We talked much of you and Miss Powel, when to him a still more interesting theme did not draw his eloquence along its channel; I mean the attractions of his lovely Sappho. I have seen a sonnet of her's that has very considerable beauty. It is really a sonnet, legitimate as elegant.

You speak, and beautifully do you speak, of indignities and gross insults committed upon the

abilities of the glorious Siddons in several of the public prints. I have never seen any thing of the kind. The General Evening Post, and the Gentleman's Magazine, are the only periodical publications I look into. I chose that newspaper because it is cleaner from scandal, detraction, and impertinence than most of its brethren. My leisure is too scanty for the indulgence of a daily paper. Nothing can be more just than your observations upon the idiot-veering of the public taste:

——— "That to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself on the celestial powers,
And feed on garbage."

It is past conjecture that P. is the source and master-spring of all the blasphemy against Siddonian excellence. Mr Siddons, as you know, traced to him the first malicious paragraphs that appeared against his wife; Mr W—— knows this, amongst other countless instances of his dark ingratitude,—and yet it seems he corresponds with him. Alas! how does this weakness abase the dignity of Mr W.'s character! Mrs Siddons and I may well exclaim to him, as Lear did to Regan, after Goneril's treachery had been unmasked,—

"O, W——, wilt thou take him by the hand!"

After the charming portrait you had given me of Mrs L——, I was indeed surprised to find that she could be taken with the affected pathos that always misses its aim so totally to the undebauched taste, so dazzled with the tinsel garb of that same coxcomb's imagination. But since I have seen some of Mrs L.'s compositions in rhyme and measure, my wonder has ceased. People often admire productions which are on a level with their own, much more than those of higher excellence. The verses in question are strikingly in P.'s style, in his miscellaneous poems. She mistakes the power of producing tuneful numbers with facility for genius, and breathes a profusion of them upon languishing lap-dogs, liberated linnets, and jilted gentlemen.

Well may you wonder what rage possesses the people who delight in seeing virtue and genius insulted in public newspapers; who, as you beautifully express it, "take a savage pleasure in drinking the intellectual life-blood of their neighbours"—justly do you observe, "that if they did not, such stuff would have no readers, and the evil would die a natural death." That it is fed and nursed into gigantic enormity, is a melancholy proof of human depravity. Whenever I see a person taking in, and reading with avidity, scandalous newspapers, I set them down for worthless—more

absolutely they cannot trespass upon the guardian golden rule of humanity—"Do unto others, as thou wouldst they should do unto thee."

The novel has not yet fallen in my way. No hours are mine to waste upon romances, that are not very eminent. Who would so waste a much more plenteous leisure, that has fifteen volumes of the glorious Richardson upon their shelves?

> ——————"Who but rather turns
> To heaven's bright orb his unrestrained view,
> Than to the glimmering of a waxen flame!
> Who, that from Alpine heights his labouring eye,
> Shoots o'er the wide horizon, to survey
> Nile, or the Ganges, rolling the broad wave
> Through mountains, plains, and spacious cities old,
> And regions dark with woods, would turn his gaze
> To mark the path of some penurious rill,
> That murmurs at his feet?"

You say Mrs Piozzi's style, in conversation, is exactly that of her travels. Our interviews were only two—no vulgarness of idiom or phrases, no ungrammatic inelegance struck me then, as escaping, amidst the fascination of her wit, and the gaiety of her spirit; but inaccuracies, and ungraceful expressions, often pass unobserved in the quick commerce of verbal society, that are very disgusting, after their deliberate passage through the pen. What testimony did her Johnson bear, both by

precept and example, against slovenly inelegance of style! What force and beauty do his observations, upon life and manners, receive from the magnificence of their language! However, if Mrs Piozzi has chosen to take a lower tone, as to style, it ought, at least, to have been pure, to have possessed the *simplex mundities* of Richardson's, Gray's, and Hayley's prose compositions, when they choose to clip the eagle wings of their eloquence.

Your opinion of Mr Hayley's tragedies is mine. If his Eudora is upon the same sentimental declamatory plan, long speeches, and few characters, I shall not like it. There is little wonder that the milk-woman's did not succeed. The tragic muse is, in this age, propitious to nobody but Jephson, at least as to inspirations of high poetic value.

Miraculous as it is, that, amidst the darkness of incultivation, and the miseries of want, Lactilla should have been able to exhibit inspirations worth any thing to a refined taste, yet I profess not to hold her claims to genius so high as many hold them. Surely, however, she has sometimes written what would not have disgraced even exalted poets. In justice to her talents, though I am afraid she is not amiable, I am tempted to inclose a few extracts from her works, to mitigate an opinion of yours, which, amounting to absolute contempt, nay, avowed detestation, becomes

a prejudice unworthy of a mind liberal as Sophia's.

Pleasant Mrs Piozzi, with all her knowledge as a linguist and an historian, is somewhat ignorant upon poetic subjects. She speaks of ode-writing as an inferior species of composition, the utmost excellence of which can (she says) place no man on a level with the epic, the dramatic, or didactic bard. Now the rank of the lyric poet, as settled by the ancients, succeeds immediately to that of the epic. Pindar, who wrote nothing but odes, is always named immediately after Homer, taking the lead of Eschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles; and our English Pindar, Gray, is the first poetic name of this century. She ought to know that the Latins place their lyric Horace next to their epic Virgil, much more on account of his odes than of his satires; for, in the latter, Juvenal vies with him. Their great didactic poet, Lucretius, though high in fame, obtained not Horatian eminence. She ought also to recollect, that Dryden owes his chief glory to his Ode.

My General Evening has this instant shewn me the fate of Eudora. I had an ill-divining soul upon her subject. From the instant I beheld Marcella in manuscript, I saw that Mr Hayley's genius was not calculated to the dramatic meri-

dian, any more than Pope's to the lyric. But I grieve for the wounded feelings of so fine a spirit on occasions like these, and regret that he quitted, for a new inauspicious sphere, the bright tracks of his glory, as a lyric and didactic bard.

Sir B—— B—— the brilliant, was lately asked, in company, his opinion of Zeluco. He replied, "No great affair as to genius, and without any graces of style—however, Zeluco is a good rough novel."—So fastidious are these modern fine men, even where they have imagination and literature. Adieu! Yours faithfully.

LETTER XC.

Dr Darwin.

Feb. 11, 1790.

Gratefully do I thank you for this second delightful present from the * new edition of the Botanic Garden. No work of length can be so perfect, but that the genius, which produced, may improve it.

The Amaryllis, with its beautiful simile and

* The second.

its note—the poetic landscapes also, after Wright, are rich additions to the first canto—that graceful name, Orixa, improves the 184th line. In my translations of the Odes of Horace, I have often found the high-vowelled names of the Greek and Roman cities produce harmonious effect in the flow of the lines: as,

> "Nor patient Lacedemon wakes my lyre,
> That trains her sons to all the warrior's toil;
> Nor me Larissa's airy graces fire,
> Though round her hills the golden vallies smile;
> But my lov'd mansion by the circling wood,
> On the green bank of clear Albunea's flood,
> Its walls resounding with the echo'd roar,
> As Anio's torrents down the mountain pour."

The Dream of the Dormouse pleases me extremely, and the happy expression "Kernell'd groves;"—not so the alteration of the rhymes *form* and *storm*, in the Colchgeum, to *air* and *hair*, because, being succeeded by *year* and *sphere*, the continued jingle cloys my ear. But I now see why they are changed, and, to be sure, the added lines, to which the discarded rhymes are removed, make large recompense. It is well to have lessened by one, the plentitude of the epithet *fair*, on the 25th and 26th page. Shakespeare's sleeping moonlight has been happily adopted in the poetic mirror of Wright's pictures. On the

60th page, the epithet to the hand of the morning, which was "red hand," is judiciously exchanged to *fair*—for a ludicrous equivoque is very undesirable. Nor am I less glad that *tender*, as applied to the yell of the young Upases, is altered to *shriller*. Above all, I rejoice that you have yielded to my persuasions, and rescued Ninon from the injustice you had done to her charms, by the epithet *withered*, and to her merits by that of *harlot*. Ninon had solid and generous virtues, to balance her amorous frailty, and, though not always constant, was at no time indiscriminately licentious. Never, surely, was a striking and tragic incident so finely told, in so short a compass, as you have now told it.

I am not aware of any alteration in the second canto.

In the third, we are infinitely indebted to the Orchis, whose description has given birth to a simile of such perfect beauty, and to a pathetic story, told in your own wonderfully picturesque manner; yet is it not unphilosophical to mention the echoes of *canvas* walls, where no echo can in reality exist? Is it not false metaphor, to talk of the *beating* of an *urn*? And do you not, in the babe's bloody fingers, present an image, whose horror passes the bounds you prescribe to the excitement of that passion in the notes.

In the fourth canto, I do not see why the epithet *calm*, expressing the serene faith of the salamander cousins, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, was exchanged for *slow*, which expresses nothing of their intellectual feelings.

The portrait of the Cannabis is introduced by a fine landscape of China, and is in itself animated and graceful in the first degree. That allusion, which succeeds to the allegoric tissue of life, opens with a new and solemn idea, and beautifully brightens on its progress.

We find the Ocyma a great poetic acquisition; the description it introduces of Lot's wife is much improved, and its interest much heightened from the passage where we found her statue in the saline city, amidst the mines of Poland. People would be apt to wonder "how the d——l it got there." I confess, however, that I do not quite like that Lota should so distinctly perceive her own odd destiny. The preceding description of the ice-flower, forms a couplet that has no superior in grace and beauty, through this whole poem, where grace and beauty are so bounteously bestowed.

Rejoicing most truly in your poetic glories, I remain, dear Sir, your obliged friend and servant.

LETTER XCI.

HUMPHRY REPTON, ESQ.

Feb. 17, 1790.

FOR one of the most ingenious, easy, witty, graceful letters I ever received, it was my hope and expectation to have thanked you in person ere this time; but our strangely softened winter is passing swiftly away; December, the promising December, is already past, and you, or let me rather say the arbitrary claims of your new profession, made its pinion faithless. It shed mild gales, and light, which, while it lasted, was almost vernal; but it shed not effusions from the eye and spirit of my friend, which had been yet more welcome.

The glowing pages before me abound with Claude and Salvatorial sketches. My imagination eagerly fills up the outlines. Nor less was I pleased with the Alderman's Eden, his canal upon the hill, and the mount in the valley; but, as you observe, where the grass looks green and lawny, the water glitters, and the trees grow luxuriantly, the vulgar eye is sufficiently gratified.

Ah! while you sport thus enchantingly with the elements of an art so dear to me, that you should dream I could call or think you pedantic! Surely there can on no subject be pedantry upon which we descant, to those who understand, and who listen to us with pleasure!

I rejoice in the success of your new profession; that your talents have, at length, struck into a track which calls forth all their strong and brilliant powers. In this track the wealthy and the vain will seek them out, employ and reward them;—because it is there that such beings can gild themselves with lustres reflected from the poet's fancy and the painter's eye, which, in the coy bowers of abstract literature, had administered little to their cravings.

Chatsworth is my native soil—the first scene of rural grandeur that met my infant eyes. It is only five miles distant from the village in which we lived during my childhood. With my father's friend, the then clergyman of Edengor, and afterwards Dean of Rapho in Ireland, we used to pass a frequent week, and the splendours of the Chatsworth scenery gratified my young admiration, beneath morning, noon-tide, and evening suns. I soon discerned capabilities in the magnificent situation of which the possessor had not, nor has yet, availed himself; and I exult that the

genius of the groves resigns his wand to your guidance. That forced and formal cascade, in which the sullen waters take their measured leaps, always offended me. If the penurious Naiad suffers not their descent to be more than temporary, surely they might yet be allowed to strike the eye with transient sublimity, and roar adown the mountain over craggy fragments, and flash through intercepting bushes.

You ask me after Zeluco. I read it, because I know its very ingenious and excellent author; else have I an absolute horror at the idea of wasting my time upon modern novels. Divine Richardson's works have made me hard to be pleased with imaginary histories. Zeluco, however, is of superior stamina to most of its brethren of this era; the characters are forcibly drawn, though we find not much grace of style. I confess it does not strike me with objection, that the leading character is so darkly coloured. The warning-lights flash upon morality through the clouds of vice, with effect perhaps more striking than from amidst the serene atmosphere of the pattern heroes. Zeluco is the Macbeth of modern novels, allowing for the transcendent superiority in point of genius, that must be acceded to the dramatic writer.

Have you read one of my darling books—the

Caliph Vathec? that strange, wild, witty, Voltairish, yet very original work; so ludicrous in its opening, and on its progress;—so very sublime in its conclusion. The Halls of Eblis form an hell, solemn and striking as the fiery Deserts of Danté, or the Erebus of Milton.

Your friends, the Ardens, are a charming family. I love them all. The rich bride of your namesake seems to have a disposition worthy of him on which she has bestowed her fortune, and calculated to make him find his best treasure in herself. I received a kindly pressing invitation from them lately to their house in Shrewsbury, and to attend a concert for the benefit of a fair syren, in whose fate I am much interested. I could not, however, accept this obliging invitation. To preserve from total extinction that dim quivering light, my poor father's existence, demands my daily unremitted cares. All its intellectual rays have gone out, one by one—even the, to *me*, so precious consciousness of my tender assiduities is extinguished,—but it remained the last of his vanishing sensibilities. Adieu! Yours.

LETTER XCII.

Mrs Piozzi.

Feb. 20, 1790.

No, dear Mrs Piozzi, you cannot possibly know so little the extent and force of your abilities, to think they could not awaken, charm, and arrest the attention, without its being first started into wonder by apparent and unexpected defect. If Shakespeare had never punned and quibbled, should we have been the less penetrated, inflamed, and delighted with his excellencies? I repeat, that you shew us, in the very work which I so long to have you weed, that you have a style at your command, perfect and polished as that of your great preceptor. Who, amongst those whom genius can think it worth its while to please, can read him without the most awakened attention; yet when does he condescend to use the dialect of the unlettered vulgar!—but I beg your pardon, dear Madam, for pressing farther an unwelcome theme, which, if I did not make sincerity my first point of honour in friendship, had never intruded upon your attention. It may perhaps occur to you,

that I might have been silent upon the subject. I consulted my own heart, and it told me that if I had published a considerable work, I should think acknowledged objections, mingled with liberal praise, more friendly than cold disregarding silence. It is the ambition of my heart to act, as much as possible, on every occasion, up to that golden rule—" Do unto others as thou wouldst," &c.

You have illustrated, in your last obliging letter, by a charmingly ingenious and just simile, the difference between Richardson's novels and Miss Burney's; but as fine painters may expect their portraits to be valuable when the persons of their originals are no more remembered, they ought to avoid adopting the dress of the times;—so, surely, fine writers should describe general nature, rather than fashionable manners.

You certainly placed Mr Merry's poetry above all other poetry the world has produced, when you asserted, that to read any other after his, was to contemplate the sculpture of Sansovino after having seen the statues, whose superiority to all other sculpture the whole world allows. Surely there can be no explaining away a meaning so single and obvious; but in speaking upon this subject in your last, you surprise me anew.

You say Mr M. having only written odes and love verses, is neither an epic, a dramatic, nor a preceptive poet, and must therefore aspire only to a fame of a far lower kind, such as an *odist* may pretend to. I have always understood that lyric poetry was the very highest order of composition next to the epic. Pindar, whom the learned world always places next in rank to Homer and Virgil, wrote only odes—and the English Pindar, Gray, is the most illustrious name of our era. Certainly, therefore, if Della Crusca's odes had been first-rate compositions in their line, he might have claimed the first honours of poetry, after the epic writers, our immortal Shakespeare alone excepted, and he is the only dramatic writer of any time, whose fame transcends that of Pindar, Horace, Dryden, and Gray. Of the claims of an ode-writer, Horace had very different ideas to those you express; witness the conclusion of his first ode to Mecænas:

> " Quod si me lyricis vatibus inseres,
> Sublimi feriam sidera vertice."

Petrarch's poetry is all or chiefly sonnets, is it not?—a short but a very arduous style of composition. His sonnets are said to be exquisite,

and have, therefore, raised his name high amidst our bards. To be able to write sonnets finely, is more honourable than to be the author of plays that are of second-rate merit. Petrarch is famed for his sonnets,—I never heard of him as a lyric poet,—yet, on their account merely, he is a name of more eminence than that of our Southern, or even Rowe. It matters little what order of composition is chosen by an highly sublimated imagination. Such a one, however, can hardly make a choice more worthy of its powers than the lyric style. Ode-writing surely attained not to excellence under the management of Cowley. We see genius in his forced and far-fetched ideas; but it is genius ill-directed, and rather calculated to disgust than to charm a correct natural taste,

> "When he on all things will intrude,
> To force some odd similitude."

There is only one of his odes that pleases me on the whole, though that is not without its faults, but it is tender, pathetic, glowing, and beautiful. I mean the ode entitled The Complaint. It is curious that Johnson, in his interesting and ingenious life of that poet, mentions it with contempt; so little did Johnson appear to understand, or feel the genuine beauty of lyric verse.

Dryden's Ode on Cecilia's Day, was the first instance in which the English lyric poets attained to first-rate excellence. Our great lyrists, Gray, Collins, and Mason, added, to the impassioned ideas, abrupt contrasting transitions, picturesque descriptions, and ardent apostrophes of that ode, the excellence of correct numbers and distincter plan. But how do those four great writers exceed the crude Pindarics of the straining metaphysic Cowley, the sweet Complaint excepted!—and, compared with theirs, how dim and unlustrous is Mr Merry's muse!

It is universally allowed, that "Dr Johnson had no taste for the higher walks of poetry;" nor is it much wonder that it should so be said of the man who has spoken contemptuously of the first odes in our language, that are allowed, by so large a majority in the literary world, to possess all the fire and sublimity of Pindar, with an happier and more interesting choice of subject; who has asserted that the odd ode of Dryden's, his Killigrew, is the noblest ode we have; in which there is little pathos, and no dignity, but a train of forced Cowleyan ideas about the soul of Anne Killigrew having animated the bodies of all the dead poets, and the Grecian poetess to boot; and about the malicious planets being all *in trine* when she was born, and about her "brother

angels" tuning their lyres high, that all the people of the sky might know that a great poetess was born on earth;—and that if the bees did not swarm upon Anne Killigrew's mouth, it was only because Heaven had not leisure for such a vulgar miracle; that now the gift of poetry is profaned with fat pollutions and steaming ordures;—but I am sick of tracing the bombast mazes of this stuff, which Johnson calls the finest ode of the language. What could he mean by it? To bring lyric poetry into disgrace, I suppose, because his poetic talents had not taken that bent. I know the selfish and narrow jealousy of that, in many respects, mighty spirit, and place to its account solely those absurd critical axioms which set the world a-gape, and force it to conclude that he wanted *taste*, where, in reality, he only wanted *truth*.

The Law of Lombardy is indeed a fine tragedy; the language, sentiments, and imagery have Shakespearean grandeur, simplicity, and fire. The character of Bireno is original, and drawn in a bold masterly style. Why should the murder of Alinda behind the scenes disgust, since that of Duncan and Banquo, in the same situation, and that of Desdemona upon the stage does not? It is absurd to affect dislike of striking horrors in a modern play, at which we awfully shudder in the plays of

Shakespeare, and confess their fine effect. What is tragedy if we banish the terrible graces! The public is an Egyptian task-master to modern dramatic writers; it calls for Shakespearean effects, yet would preclude the use of the most important means by which they were produced.

You say that, but for my ingenuousness, you should have missed seeing censures upon your last volumes, and yet tell me, that the critical reviewers passed much the same judgment upon the work in July last. I give you my solemn word of honour, that I have never seen nor heard any printed strictures upon that lovely, bewitching, slipshod slattern of yours, which I so long to see divested of her brass ring and rusty black handkerchief.

My heart thanks you for the kind conclusion of your last, and warmly returns its friendly benedictions. It acknowledges also, with grateful pleasure, the continuance of Mr Piozzi's assured welcome, if ever I should have it in my power to visit Streatham.

LETTER XCIII.

MRS KNOWLES.

Feb. 23, 1790.

MY dear friend, your kind letter of November 27th reached me not till the second week in January. The box of Mr Rowley's, in which it travelled, was kept unopened so long. Charming as are its contents, they were fortunately not any of them complexioned for the necessity of early comment. My beloved Mrs Knowles's letters are of all, *all* hours, unlike those epistolary volatiles, whose spirit evaporates as events grow stale, and popular topics change their ground. Wit, eloquence, philosophy,

> " These themselves do far advance
> Above the power of time and space;
> They scorn such outward circumstance,
> Their time's for ever; everywhere their place."

My heart thanks the friendly premonition with which your letter opens. It is about my taking exercise. You were, from experience, too well justified in concluding, that it would probably be

fruitless; but the studious, or social sedentariness, for it is equally disposed to be either, so certainly natural to me, was, last summer, startled into peripatetic exertion, by oppressed respiration. Since that period, I have walked generally an hour in a day, as round a pace as my strength will permit, in the Dean's Walk, "when chill blustering winds, or driving rain, prevent not my *willing* feet"—no, I cannot quite say that, my *stimulated* feet—to pace their vowed mile upon the gravel. When they *do* prevent them, I remember your injunction in a long past letter, to tear along the gallery, clawing, like a wild cat, at the windows. There is no boasting that the whimsical portrait entirely suits me. However, along the gallery I do pace to and fro, though rather more like a tame than a wild cat; and I often make noise enough to rival cats, even in their moments of cruel love. In the conviction, that my lungs, as well as my limbs, require exercise, when I walk in the gallery, I close the end doors, and repeat long passages from our poets, aloud, the metrical treasures of my early years, or resume the pleasing labour of the memory, which continues to accumulate them. Social engagements, or household attentions, engrossing so perpetually the later hours of the day, I am obliged to subtract this earlier one from the leisure I

used to devote to my absent friends, and to now and then admitting "the Ladies of the Mountain." Those who love me will consent to a longer interval between my letters, for my health's sake; and as to the "yellow hair'd god, and his nine fusty maids," I make no scruple to slap the gallery door in their faces, when they approach me with extended pen.

And now, ere you fall quite asleep over my egotisms, let me endeavour to wave them, and follow the course of your last letter, when, springing from my shoulders, after having muttered kind warnings in my ear, it stretches its strong pinion, and soars into brighter tracks.

Admirably do you moralize upon the enamoured daring of the fair apostate, as you seem to consider her;—but she is not considered here as having absolutely apostatized. As a daughter of the church, I might be reproached with using that word, yet I scruple not its use, as applied to one, who, educated in a strict self-denying system, suffers the voice of love to turn her mind into laxer principles. She is very retired, makes no new intimacies in our little city, and plays no cards. It seems she was addressed some few years back, by a gentleman of your persuasion, Mr Zachary, of benevolent character, with an affluent fortune, living in a little Eden of his own.

Whether the fair Favoretta liked not the thoughts of a mutilated husband,—for you know the accident which deprived him of a limb,—or whatever else was her objection, she proved, fortunately for a frank-hearted, pleasant friend of mine, cruel. You know Mrs S., she has two twin sisters, short low-browed nymphs, that wore their dark hair in reverse curls upon their naturally unlofty foreheads, long before any body else so wore it. Thence Sophia and I used to call them the little bull-calves. On a late visit to her sister, one of these dear little *bullys* buts her curled pate into Mr ————'s heart, and last September, got into nice matrimonial pasture in his blooming and fruitful fields.

I must, however, observe, that the nymph is vastly polished and improved since the days in which she and her sister obtained the above playful appellation, given not in spleen, but jocularity. She passed a month with me in the close of last autumn. I found her sensible, ingenious, and affectionate. Though fashion has now bullified us all, yet the poke, and a certain scowl over the brow, and a kind of bounce-about gait, makes her retain a little of her sometime resemblance.

There is about her no dearth of Babylonianisms,—the smart cap, the high feather, the ball, the play, and the song, are constitutionally dear;

yet, as she has sense and affections, I think she will domesticate, especially if she should be fruitful, as her sisters have proved, whose olive branches rise swiftly around their board; for the twin-bully has been three or four years in the matrimonial herd, on the fat meads of Yorkshire, literally led thither by a tolerably wealthy gentleman farmer and grazier.

To return to the bride of Mr ———. She was, on her visit to me last year, more interesting by the effects of love, sickened and shadowed over by doubtful hope; Mr ——— had not then declared himself. Her small fortune, and, yet more, her religion against her;—but luck has been a lord to Charlotte.

Favoretta is gentle, her emperor energetic. Mr Z. they tell me, is mild, and Charlotte is high-spirited. Probably, therefore, the former will lead his wife, the latter her husband into the bosom of mother church. If their consciences do not twinge them when they get there, it may be all very well. Bigotry, in every persuasion, recedes fast from the human mind. And now we will dismiss Mrs Z. in whose happiness my heart rejoices, though my pen has been so impertinently saucy over her figure, which, in spite of a little *bullism*, is not void of attractions, since,

though very low, she is well made, has fine hair, teeth of pearl, and an hand and arm of the Parian marble.

Genius and eloquence shed all their lustre over your professions of benevolent faith, concerning the progressive state of virtue and true piety, upon this little speck in the universe—our earth; —but I, a colder sceptic concerning such progress, am afraid there never was so little of either to be found upon its surface. With the weeds of religion, her persecuting cruelties, the flowers, alas, have been rooted up. Numbers assure me, who have had opportunities of seeing and knowing, that France is almost wholly a nation of Deists;—that her people at large have been laughed by Voltaire, out of persecution, on one hand, and on the other, out of the fancy, that there was merit in turning the other cheek to the blows of oppression.

Their minds, tempered by the leaven of witty ridicule, it remained only to rise and exert themselves. The narrow policy, and short-sighted selfishness of the French court, sent them to pilfer forfeited English gingerbread, to the very school in which the vital principles of freedom are taught, both by precept and example.

From the inspirations of freedom, we may turn our thoughts to the inspirations of the muses,

without very violent transition. The herbal intrigues, as you humourously call them, in Darwin's illustrious poem, however interesting to botanists, from the notes at the bottom, seem, to the poetic eye, the least material part. It will be apt to view them but as vehicles, which introduce those Claude and Salvatorial landscapes; —those splendid similies;—those happy allusions to interesting parts of history, and to ingenious fables; those wonderfully picturesque descriptions of ancient and modern arts, gracefully impersonised, and, with all their complicated machinery, distinctly brought to the eye.

It is astonishing, that so fine a work could have been produced, that does not interest the human passions, nor contain any precepts of moral rectitude. However, the sins of this beautiful sport of fancy against them, are merely those of omission; surely it has no tendency to inflame the first, or to undermine the second.

Is it possible you have not read the Piozzian travels? You, who profess to interest yourself in the female right to literature and science, ought not to turn such a cold incurious eye towards any thing which advances the progress of that claim. With all its unaccountable oddness, and perpetual vulgarism of style, it is highly worth the attention of kindred genius. If you

would like to know the soil of the clime, the scenery, the disposition, the manners, the habits of the cities of Rome, Naples, Genoa, Venice, Bologna, &c. just as familiarly as you know all these things at Rugely, Birmingham, and Lichfield, you must shut yourself up for a few days with those volumes. No other's travels I ever read possess their discriminating powers.

I am charmed with your portraits of our Princes at Brighthelmstone, and their train of supple courtiers. If I had not so often seen ordinary phizes resemble beautiful ones, I should be flattered that you think me so like the buxom widow, who tows our plump heir-apparent about by the heart-strings. Several others have told me of the resemblance between us.

My dear father yet exists. During three weeks of this flower-soft winter, he suffered so much from a violent cough, and difficulty of breathing, that, if the disorder had continued, I hope I should not have been so selfish to wish his life prolonged; but, returning to his former quiescent state, my ardent desire to detain yet longer, this dim resemblance of a beloved parent, repossesses my heart.

Last week arrived news that thrilled my heart with tender melancholy; the cutting off, by hereditary consumption, of that fair blossom, the

daughter of my lost Honora. I have been assured she possessed her mother's beauty, and all those native intellectual graces, whose influence shone long upon my happiness, like a vernal morning.—Honora Edgeworth was just fifteen. And grieving is the consciousness, that all remains, all traces of my soul's idol vanish thus from the earth. Her boy, ever feeble and delicate, will, I suppose, follow his lovely sister to an early grave.

Lady G. of Lichfield, long invalid, and far advanced in life, sunk from us some few months since. A civil, social being, as you know, "whose care was, never to offend;" who had the spirit of a gentlewoman, in never doing a mean thing; whose mite was never withheld from the poor; and whose inferiority of understanding and knowledge, found sanctuary at the card-table, that universal leveller of intellectual distinctions. Her loss will make a considerable chasm in the pleasures of many, who like to be often engaged in card-parties, without the trouble of forming them at home.

Soon after followed the very aged Mrs F., who had lived ninety-two years in the world, without conciliating the esteem of a single being. A creature of selfish avarice, she died unlamented.

Seldom have I seen a young man more qualified to pass innocently, laudably, and happily, a life of leisure, than your George. If he likes the sports of the field, moderately taken, they would advantage his health; and when there is such a love of books and the pencil, as dwells with him, no danger would surely arise, that he should take field sports immoderately. His dependence upon you, his attachment to your person, your abilities, your virtues, form a bulwark about him against the vices of youth. The fortune which he will inherit from you, as the reward of his good conduct, is more than competent to the elegant comforts of life. Ah! why then endeavour to inspire him with the desire of accumulating so affluent a property? Is there a passion,—nay, is there a vice, which the New Testament declares more fatal to Christian peace, and Christian virtue, than the thirst of riches? Never has experience shewn that happiness was the result of wealth, beyond the pale of affluence. Finely does that master of the human heart, that Shakespeare of prose, Richardson, express himself upon this subject: "You are, all of you, too rich to be happy, child; for must not each of you, by the constitutions of your family, be put upon making yourselves still richer; and so every individual of it, except yourself, will go on accu-

mulating; and, wondering that they have not happiness, since they have riches, continue to heap up, till death, as greedy an accumulator as themselves, gathers them into his garner."

It seems strange to me, than any person of an exalted mind, untainted with the vices of profusion, and undazzled by the splendour of ostentation, can wish a beloved child to imbibe the desire of increasing an affluent property;—stranger still, that a pious character should so wish, since the Scriptures declare it easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The expression, *rich man*, certainly means a miser; and how great a temptation to this exclusive vice, is the habit of living daily in contemplation, and constant attention, to heaps of sordid Mammon!

Forgive my ingenuousness; the sincerity of an almost life-long friendship.

You will soon see, if you have not already seen, our generous, open-hearted friend, Mr Saville. I am afraid you will think he looks ill. He will tell you all about himself, his Elizabeth, and about the dissolution of all acquaintance with Mr N. and myself.

I wish you would ask for a description of Mr Saville's disorder in his stomach. You must have skill and discernment, living so long with

an able physician, who had an ingenuous desire of imparting his knowledge. As to the magnetic art, if it really possessed the powers which are attributed to it, the fame of miracles, transcending those of the Saviour and his apostles, must spread and increase every day, instead of sinking, as it does, from the notice of the multitude.

Strong imagination, thirst for the marvellous! what will ye not do with the strongest minds, when once ye seize upon them?

Neither you nor I, my dear Mrs Knowles, ought to apologize to each for our sincerity, or for our hurried and defaced scribbling; both are habits of long standing, the one laudable, the other inconsequential. Adieu! adieu.

LETTER XCIV.

Henry Cary, Esq.

March 16, 1790.

Exhausted, spiritless, cold to every subject of abstract disquisition, my pen can do little more

than briefly thank you, my dear young friend, for your two letters yet unacknowledged.

I feel the kindness, in some respects, and the justice in others, of your consolatory remarks on the death of my dearest father; but I feel also that I have lost one of the most precious blessings of my existence, the revered, the so fondly loved, the helpless object of those sweet, though anxious cares, that were their own reward. Now I seem to breathe in an atmosphere of cold silence. I press my pillow at midnight in gloomy serenity,

> " And ask no more, at morn's returning ray,
> If he has health, that I may bless the day."

— — — — — —

The taste for Italian poetry, you have well defended by example;—but I have always understood that modern Italian poetry is much degenerated; that it is disgraced by quaint ideas, and by playing with particular words, and bandying them about from line to line. This is a practice which always disgusts me, even when I find it in Spenser and Shakespeare. Of the Italian sonnets you sent me, not one is free from that miserable affectation.

Respecting the critics—Burke is a born poet; and though he writes not in rhyme or measure,

the poetic ray illuminates every thing he utters or writes. Blair's criticisms I have not seen. It is long since I read the elder Warton—but I recollect no impression to the honour of his powers, that was quite so vivid as that which I felt from those of his brother. But Joseph Warton has written very fine poetry. His dying Indian is sublime. The shortest work, if it is executed finely, almost equally with the longest, ascertains the possession of genius. He must, therefore, be an able critic, when, divesting himself of prejudice, he descants upon the beauties and blemishes of his brethren.

I regret, not having seen you when you were last at Lichfield. From sounds that would have smote my heart, with, perhaps, fatal violence, and from the last solemn ceremonies, I had fled to a distance that shielded me from their impression. I will never forget Mrs Lister's attention to me in the hours of my anguish. Adieu.

LETTER XCV.

MRS STOKES.

March 26, 1790.

ALAS, my dear friend, your letter, that so kindly rejoiced in a supposed existence, which, amidst all its dimness, was thrice precious to my heart, arrived when that existence had everlastingly ceased.

Long as the dart of death had been shook over the head of my dearest father, I could not see it descend without agony. Time is the great assuager. Already has it begun to give some degree of cheerfulness to my resignation; at least during those hours in which much and various business presses upon my attention, and when a number of my neighbours are calling upon me in succession, and while these vernal suns are gilding every object with hues so lively. Yet find I many minutes in these days, in which I regretfully miss those tender cares which, in their exertion, were so sweet to my spirit, when I protected, sustained, and comforted the dear Helpless, and

tempered the air to my shorn lamb. Alas! no longer does the kiss I used to imprint upon his aged forehead, as he slept, shed its balm over my own rest—no longer does intelligence that he lives, and lives exempt from pain, inspirit my uprising. Those pleasures are gone for ever; yet their recollection proves my best cordial.

Glad am I that the demons of disease have been expelled from your dwelling, and that your lovely infants delight you by their expanding genius.

I perfectly recollect how pleasing I thought the tone of Dr Stokes's voice in our first interview—yet, certainly, nothing can be more unlike those of my dear, long lost Honora. Strange that Mrs Butt should think them similar! Though of magical persuasion, they were the reverse of your husband's, which always take a very high key. Honora's tones were so uncommonly low, that, when she was reading any thing querulously plaintive, she could not raise them to the requisite key—yet, like the murmurs of an Eolian harp, they sunk into the soul.

I am gratified that you and Dr Stokes, and Mr Butt, like my sonnet from the Italian, on the destruction of Catania and Syracuse; also that you

twain think with me on the subject of the two great bards, between whose urns differing opinions have created rivalry. But, my dear Mrs Stokes, in this literary dispute between myself and a man of unquestionable and considerable genius, I wonder to see you lay stress on a circumstance so adventitious as the difference of rank between us. While I lament the strength of Mr Weston's prejudices, and blush for the wild enthusiasm of his partiality to myself, I am conscious, from all I have seen, from all I learn of him from others, who have known him long and thoroughly, that he has a warm, generous, and honest heart. Surely that elevating treasure of the bosom, and the consciousness of illuminated talents, qualifies an Englishman to lift up his brow, and to tell himself that, according to the claims of ceremonial precedence, he stands on even ground with *any* companion, or with his opponent, in *any* controversy. For my part, I acknowledge I feel no other real superiority but that which virtue and talents give. Were Handel living, I should approach and address him with much more awe than any merely-good sort of body upon the throne of England. People, who have themselves no intellectual superiorities, may be expected to contend for the idle claims of acci-

dental distinctions. Chance may give them wealth enough to purchase titles, if they do not already possess them; but it is not in possibility to give them talents;—but you, my dear Mrs Stokes, you! to derive the title of *gentleman* from birth, from wealth, or the nature of a profession?—that you should so prostitute that name! which, in the vocabulary of good sense, can mean, and only mean, a man of gentle manners!

I grant you Weston is an insane dreamer, to talk in raptures of nonentities—but as to the liberty taken in praising a woman's person in print, I never knew that considered as impertinence, were she an empress; while there would be both indelicacy and impertinence in those praises, were they uttered to her in private.

And pardon me also about the comparison between him and Newton; as to their genius I mean. Weston is a volatile character, all openness, ardour, glow; but, though he has odd singularities, is far, very far, from being a man of effrontery. Then he has wit and humour, "that set the table in a roar," and an imagination more creative, more warm and sublimated, than the meek, modest, and very ingenious bard of the Peak-hills. They are both miracles—but Weston holds the torch of genius higher; indeed he

has had greater advantages, a Latin education, and having been always in genteel society.

Adieu! and believe me always yours.

END OF VOLUME SECOND

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